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by Donald Bayne Hobart

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February 1956

Volume 15

Number 5

FAMOUS DETECTIVE STORIES

All Stories New, No Reprints

In This Issue

Featured Novel

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Johnny Morton had read stories where the detective wakes up to find a dead blonde in his bed — but never where the hero found a bear sleeping beside him! Then, as memory began to come back, he found that he'd deserted his lovely bride, and that there were two dead men in the closet of the room in which he now found himself!

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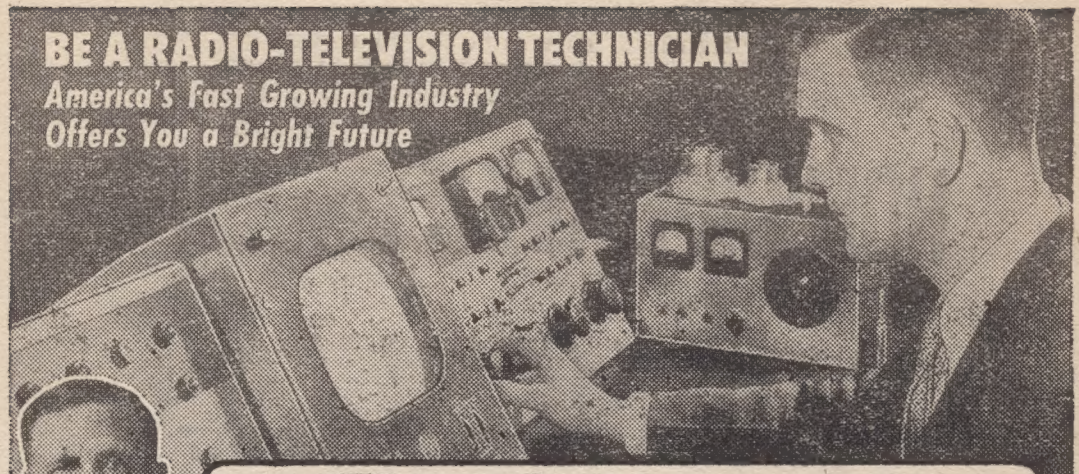

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It was bad enough waking up in bed with a bear in a strange hotel room, unable to figure out who he was or what he was doing there. Then came the phone call, suggesting he look in the closet — where he found two corpses, freshly stabbed. And this was only the beginning!

HOMICIDE HONEYMOON

Featured Novel of Midnight Murder

by DONALD BAYNE HOBART

HE TRIED to think who he was, and where he was, but couldn't remember either one; it was an eerie feeling, and he didn't like it in the least. Then he blinked and looked around him, still trying to identify himself and his surroundings. The room in which he found himself seemed quite comfortable, but decidedly unfamiliar. It was daylight and through the windows he saw the towering bulk of the Empire State Buildings looming in the distance.

"An old family landmark," he said. "A sight cherished by my family for generations. It proves I'm practically anywhere in Manhattan."

He had been sleeping in a single bed, and an impersonal air about the room suggested a hotel. He swung his long legs over the side of the bed and stared out the nearest window. There was a fuzzy taste in his mouth, he had a headache, and the entire past appeared a total blank.

"I seem to have lost my memory," he said, "but I think my first name is Johnny. At least it will do for—"

He broke off abruptly. From behind him came the creaking of bedsprings as if a heavy person moved restlessly in their sleep. Finding he was not alone came as a shock. Johnny slowly looked over his shoulder and discovered there were twin beds in the room.

"Something I drank, no doubt," said Johnny, as he stared at the other bed. "Personally I prefer little pink elephants."

On the other bed, the covers were drawn up so only a large head was visible. It was quite furry and Johnny tried to make himself believe he wasn't looking at the head of a large brown bear.

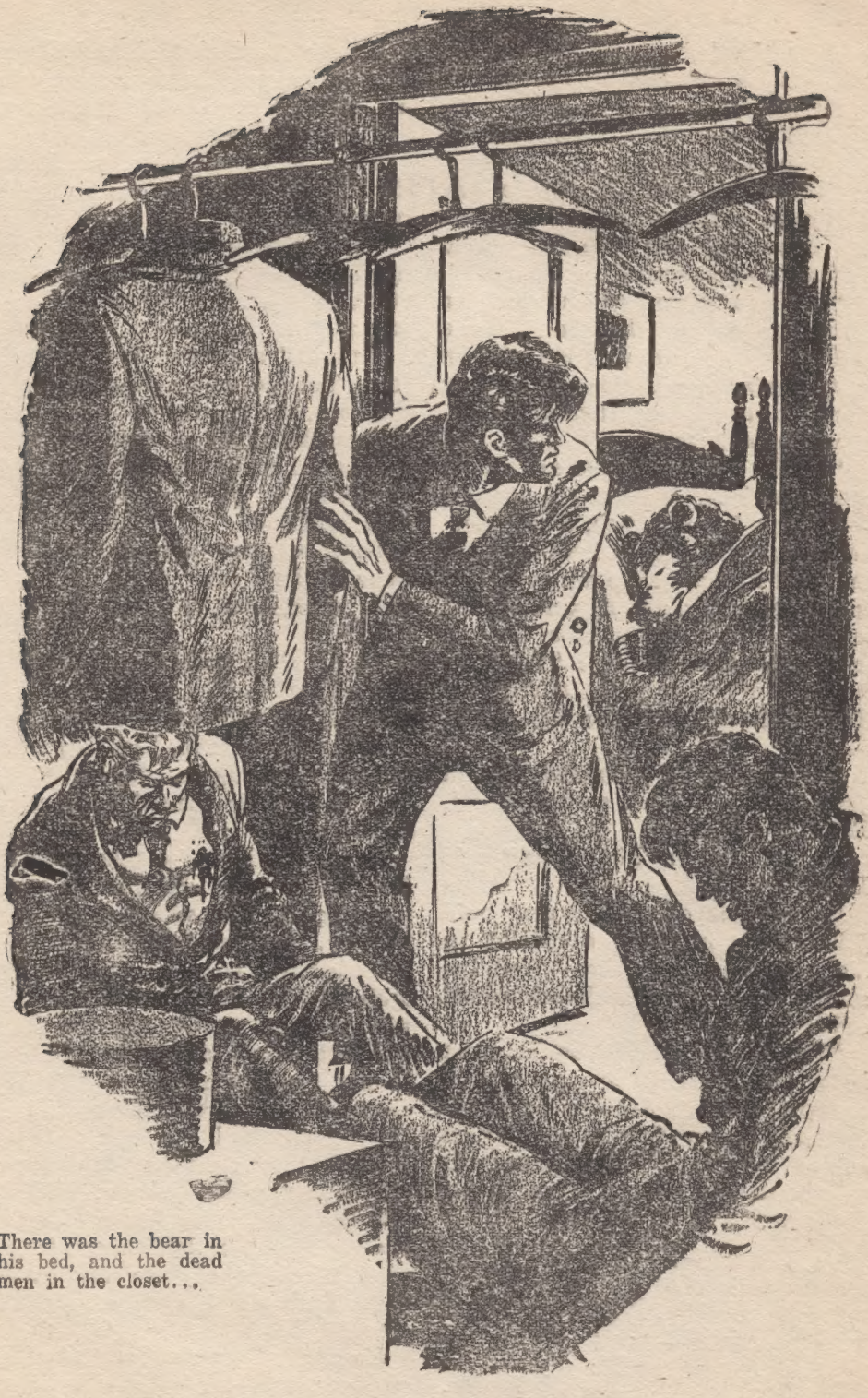
There was a knock on the closed door of the room. Johnny found he was wearing gray pajamas with red and green horseshoes on them. He didn't think much of his taste in night attire. The knock on the door was repeated. The bear appeared to be a sound sleeper—it did not open its eyes.

Johnny went to the door. A bellboy stood there, tray in hand. He looked at the tall, dark-haired young man in pajamas and grinned. Like most bellboys he appeared to be a man of the world. "Here's the scotch and soda you phoned down for, Mr. Bruin," he said.

"Mr. who?" asked Johnny.

"Bruin." The bellboy winked. "And that's a bear of a name, much better than Jones or Smith."

"And Mr. Bruin phoned down for



There was the bear in his bed, and the dead men in the closet...

scotch and soda," said Johnny dazedly. "What's your name?"

"Eddie Doyle, sir," said the bellboy. "You look kind of pale, mister, don't you feel well?"

"That all depends," said Johnny, "Come in, Eddie. Do me a favor. Tell me if you see the same thing I do in that bed over there?"

"I've been wondering about that ever since you opened the door," Doyle said. "Of course, everyone to their own taste, I always say." He put the tray down on a table and stepped over to the twin bed. "Oh, my!"

"Well?" demanded Johnny, as he stood watching.

"I don't feel very well, thank you," said Doyle. "I seem to have spots, or maybe it's bears before my eyes." He looked at Johnny, a small, sandy-haired man in a neat uniform—a shocked expression on his thin face. "The management isn't going to like it. The Park Towers doesn't go in for this sort of thing."

"Never mind the management," said Johnny. "What do you see in that bed, Eddie?"

"A brown bear, Mr. Bruin," said Doyle.

"Don't call me Mr. Bruin," said Johnny, certain that just couldn't be his last name. "I'm Johnny— Well, I'm sure I didn't phone for the scotch and soda."

"You mean the bear must have put in the order?" The bellboy gave a nice example of swift dawning horror as he backed away from the bed. "I'm leaving right now!" He stepped out through the door, closing it quickly behind him.

JOHNNY sighed, and glanced at the bed next to his own. The bear was still sleeping soundly. The phone rang and Johnny picked it up.

"Hello?" he said. "If this is for Mr. Bruin he's still sleeping and doesn't wish to be disturbed— I hope!"

"Never mind that, Mr. Morton," said a deep masculine voice at the other end of the line. "Look in the closet."

"Do what?" Johnny asked.

There was no answer, merely the click of a receiver as the man on the phone hung up.

"So I'm Johnny Morton," said Johnny as he slowly put down the phone. "Guess I must be; the name sounds natural."

He stared at a closed door across the room. The door of the connecting bath was open, so this other one must be the clothes closet. He started toward it, then halted, an uneasy feeling sweeping over him.

"I won't do it," he said firmly. "Might be more strange animals in there. Perhaps later, when I'm in the right mood—and, I hope, my right mind."

He found his clothes on a chair near his bed and decided to get dressed. If the bellboy told the overly-sensitive management about the bear they would probably investigate. Johnny felt it best to be fully dressed for such an occasion.

Apparently he had checked into the hotel the previous night, for he saw a traveling bag he instinctively felt was his own. He opened it to get out his shaving kit—then stood staring at the knife. It was a wicked-looking weapon with a bone handle, and the sharp blade was covered with dried blood. It was resting on what had been a clean soft white shirt, but which was also blood-stained.

Horror, and a strange sort of terror, was strong within Johnny. Had he killed somebody with that knife during the night and couldn't remember it now? Was that why the man on the phone had told him to look in the closet?

He gradually regained control of his emotions. It seemed vitally important he get dressed in a hurry. He managed to get his shaving kit out of the bag

without touching the knife. Perhaps someone else had placed the weapon there, and his fingerprints weren't on it. He glanced over his shoulder as he quickly closed the bag, with some wild idea Mr. Bruin might be watching him. The brown bear slept peacefully on.

Johnny hurried into the bathroom, hastily washed and shaved, then quickly dressed. He kept looking at the closet as he finished tying his tie and put on his coat. It was strange how menacing a closed door could be.

"No use stalling any longer," he muttered. "I've got to know what's in there."

He forced himself to open the door. Then he just stood there feeling sick and scared.

THE CLOSET was unusually large and had an electric light in the ceiling that automatically turned on when the door opened. There were two men slumped down on the floor of the closet, as if they were just sitting there, but the glassy stare of death was in their eyes.

The man on the left was gray-haired and wearing shirt, trousers and a smoking jacket. There was dried blood on his shirt over his heart and a jagged rip in the linen. The other man was young, blond and dressed in a light gray suit. He, too, had been stabbed in the heart.

Johnny jumped as he heard a loud knock on the door of the room. He hesitated, then quickly closed the closet door, turned the key in the outside of the lock, and thrust it into his pocket. The knocking grew more insistent.

He went to the door and opened it. A big, square-faced man stood there. He wore a blue suit, gray shirt, gray soft hat and a tie that struck Johnny as a bit loud. It had a nude woman painted on it.

"Took you long enough to answer the door," said the big man, as if he considered being kept waiting a personal insult. "I'm Dan Carson, the house detective. Your name John Morton?"

"It is," said Johnny, finding he was surprisingly calm. "Something on your mind, Mr. Carson?"

"Yeah." Carson stepped in, closing the door behind him. "Bears."

"That's been worrying me, too" said Johnny; "I don't know how he got in that bed."

"What became of her?" Carson asked.

"Her?"

"The dame," said Carson. "You checked in as Mr. and Mrs. John W. Morton from Baltimore, Maryland. It's on the register card and there was a blonde dame with you. Your wife—we hope!"

"Oh, yes, of course," said Johnny hastily, though he couldn't remember a thing about it. "She went out shopping, I guess; I just got up."

Carson went to the twin beds and stood looking at the bear, who sighed in its sleep and turned over.

"Say, he's kinda cute, ain't he? I like animals." The house detective looked at Johnny. "Funny thing about this room—one of our permanent guests lived here for the past five years. A retired banker named Jeffery Marshall. Nice old guy— I was surprised to learn he checked out suddenly last night."

"Marshall," said Johnny. "I think I've seen him." He quickly described the older of the two corpses in the closet. "That the man?"

"That's him, all right," Carson said. "So you've seen him around." The phone rang and the house detective picked it up. "Probably the management. I'll take it. Hello, yes, huh? All right, I'll see about it."

Carson put down the phone and stood frowning thoughtfully. Johnny didn't care for the house detective's

expression. Carson looked like he could develop a nasty disposition with only slight encouragement.

"The management?" Johnny asked, wondering about the phone call.

"No." Carson shook his head. "Some nut trying to give you a rib, I guess; he said look in the closet and you'd find a couple of dead men."

"Sounds crazy to me," Johnny said quickly. "What shall we do about the bear?"

"Oh, him," Carson said indifferently, glancing at the closed door of the closet. "Funny about that phone call. The more I think of it, the more it sounded like the guy really meant it."

Carson went closer to the bear's bed. Johnny had a hunch. He slipped the closet key from his pocket and dropped it on the rug near the door. The house detective swung around and stared at Johnny.

"What that guy said keeps worrying me." Carson walked toward the closet. "Yeah, it sure does."

"It worries me, too," said Johnny truthfully.

Carson tried the closet door and found it locked. He glanced down, saw the key and picked it up. He slowly unlocked the door and pulled it open. The dead men looked like two dummies huddled down on the floor. Carson cursed under his breath.

Johnny found a chair and sat down. He couldn't think of anything else to do. The house detective stopped swearing and swiftly examined the bodies in the closet. Finally he turned and glared at Johnny. His square face was hard and his dark eyes looked mean.

"The management ain't going to like this, either," Carson said. "I think you're in trouble, mister."

"I don't think so," said Johnny weakly; "I know it."

Carson just nodded. He walked over to the phone and picked it up. He never took his eyes off Johnny, and his face seemed like something carved out of rock. "Get me the police," he told the hotel operator. "Homicide. This is Dan Carson. I want to report a couple of murders."

- 2 -

THE NEXT half hour seemed to Johnny Morton the longest he had ever spent in his life. Carson refused to do much talking, and Johnny couldn't think of any interesting topics of conversation.

Finally the hotel room was filled with too many people —at least that was Johnny's impression—for the police had arrived. The Homicide Squad, the men from the nearest precinct, and from the District Attorney's office, were all going about their duties with much the same business-like attitude that might be shown by a bunch of workmen building a house.

The police photographer had taken pictures. An assistant medical examiner had examined the bodies, and given his report. A couple of detectives inspected everything in the bathroom. Johnny waited anxiously for someone to start looking through his bag and find the knife, but no one even touched it. The brown bear was still sleeping in the other bed; apparently nothing bothered Mr. Bruin.

A lean, gray-haired man dressed in a well fitting blue pin-stripe suit, gray soft shirt, maroon tie and gray snap-brim hat appeared to be in charge, for he had been issuing orders and getting reports ever since he arrived. Johnny discovered this was Captain Robert Drake in charge of Homicide. A stout, bald-headed man dressed in a gray suit, and carrying a stenographer's notebook

and pencil was always near the captain.

Finally the men with the long wicker baskets appeared and took the bodies away. Most of the Homicide Squad and the other men also disappeared. Johnny found that only Drake, the stout man, Carson and the bear remained in the room.

"All right, Mr. Morton," Drake said. "Now let's have your story." The captain looked at the stout man, who had seated himself in a chair. "Take it down, Tom."

"Of course," said Ward, pencil ready on a page of the shorthand book. "Go on, Mr. Morton."

"I didn't kill those two men," Johnny said. "Somebody called me on the phone and told me to look in the closet. When I did, I found the dead men sitting there and was scared and a little sick. I closed the door of the closet. Then Carson, the house detective, came up to see me about the bear."

"Where did the bear come from?" Drake asked.

"I don't know," said Johnny. "When I woke up this morning the bear was in the next bed. I haven't been able to remember a thing about the past, what I'm doing in this room or why. My memory is a complete blank."

"That's too bad," said Ward; "you're probably one of those cases they call by a medical term that sounds like demented peacocks."

"Since you apparently remember your name, the rest of it may come back in time, Mr. Morton," said Drake soothingly; "I hope so, anyway."

The three men gazed thoughtfully at Johnny, and he was sure he was acting guilty, though he didn't know why. The phone rang and he jumped. Drake stared at Johnny, then glanced at Ward and Carson, and went over and picked up the phone.

"Hello?" Drake said over the wire. "Johnny Morton? ...Yes he's here... Who is calling? ...Oh, his partner... Do you mind if I ask the name of the firm? ...Lanceford, Farrell and Morton, Attorneys At Law.... I see... And you're Mark Farrell?..." Hold the wire, I'll call Mr. Morton."

"Thanks," said Johnny as he walked over and took the phone from the captain. "Mr. Morton speaking."

"My, you're formal," said Mark Farrell. "This is your partner, Mark Farrell—remember?"

"No," said Johnny, staring at Ward, "that's just the trouble; I don't remember."

The stout police stenographer made a note of it. Drake gazed thoughtfully at the sleeping bear. Carson looked blank.

"You'd better get here as soon as you can," Johnny said, feeling if he did have a couple of partners who were attorneys he needed them now. "I'm in trouble."

"Don't be silly," said Farrell. "It was all a joke." His laugh struck Johnny as a nasty sound. "I'd loved to have seen you when you woke up and found that bear in the other bed."

"I don't mind the bear," said Johnny; "It's the dead men in the closet that are worrying me."

"The *what* in the *where?*" demanded Farrell in amazed tones.

"The dead men in the closet," repeated Johnny. "That was Captain Drake of Homicide who answered the phone. You just admitted you knew about the bear, so you're in this up to your neck. You better find Lanceford and both of you get here at once. Hurry up— I'm not fooling!"

HE HUNG up and looked at the other three men. Ward was busy writing shorthand in his book. The captain seated himself on the edge of the unmade bed. Carson just stood near the door.

"Your first blunder, Morton," said Drake. "Trying to implicate your partner—that's the action of a guilty man."

"But Mark Farrell knew about the bear, which is more than I remember about Farrell," protested Johnny. "He seemed to think my waking up and finding Mr. Bruin in the next bed was a big joke."

"So that's the bear's name," said Ward, making a note of it.

"I don't understand about Mr. King," said Carson; "he should have been here before this."

"Who is Mr. King?" asked Drake.

"Why Stanton King is the hotel manager," said the house detective. "He must know what's going on."

Johnny dropped into a chair. He sat gazing at the captain and trying to get used to the fact he was an attorney with two partners. He hoped their law business was good.

He suddenly grew fascinated as the bear stirred and then opened one eye. In Johnny's estimation the glare from that eye was decidedly baleful and Mr. Bruin's gaze was fixed on Captain Drake's back. The bear opened both eyes which made the gaze twice as baleful.

"He—he's awake," Johnny said.

"Maybe not," said Carson. "Mr. King always sleeps mornings. He likes to keep late hours—maybe he went to a night club and didn't get back until dawn."

Carson was staring at the half-open door of the room, and Ward was busy writing in his notebook. Johnny was still watching the bear. Mr. Bruin quietly slid off the other bed and lumbered to his hind feet. To Johnny the bear looked at least ten feet tall.

"What's the matter with you, Morton?" Drake asked, staring at Johnny. "You seem ill. Probably mixed your drinks last night—that will give you the worst sort of hangover."

"Behind you, Captain," Johnny tried to shout, but found he could only whisper.

Before Drake could even look around Mr. Bruin came close behind him and placed a paw on each of the captain's shoulders. Drake glanced at those hairy paws with their claws and just sat still and looked sick. Mr. Bruin appeared to like the captain. The bear put his head beside Drake's and licked the police official's left cheek with his tongue.

"Stop it!" Drake shouted wildly. "That tickles!"

Apparently Drake's words hurt Mr. Bruin's feelings. The bear took his paws off the captain's shoulders and moved back, sadly wagging his head from side to side.

Ward glanced up and saw the bear. The police stenographer uttered a gurgling sound and nearly fell off his chair. Carson began to edge toward the door; evidently the house detective loved animals from a distance. Mr. Bruin came to the center of the room just as Johnny got to his feet. The bear suddenly grabbed him and began to waltz with him.

"I hate dancing without music," Ward said; he was still holding his notebook and pencil, so he made a note of it. "Like the movies when something happens to the sound track."

Johnny and the bear were still waltzing. Mr. Bruin was holding him so tightly he couldn't breathe, and he realized what people really meant by a bear hug. He didn't recommend it. "That's it, Mr. Bruin," Johnny gasped. "You're doing very nicely, but don't hold me so close."

To his amazement the bear slackened his grip, but kept right on waltzing. Drake sat on the edge of the unmade bed, watching fascinated. The captain began to whistle a popular waltz. Mr. Bruin appeared to like that very much; he went right on waltzing with Johnny.

Johnny flung his shoe against the window, as Nancy raised the heavy box...

FROM THE corridor of the eleventh floor of the Park Towers Hotel there came the shrill scream of a woman. Mr. Bruin stopped dancing and looked amazed as he stepped back from Johnny. Captain Drake got quickly to his feet. Dan Carson was nearest the door, and flung it wide open.

Just about the prettiest blonde Johnny Morton had ever seen, as far as he could remember, stood there gazing at him wildly, a pleading look in her blue eyes. She was clad in a smart summer dress; her hair was cut fairly short, and was very neat.

"Johnny, darling," she said, as she stepped into the room. "I've been waiting all night for you to come back to our room. I've been so worried! Now when I started looking for you I find you in here waltzing with a bear!"

The police stenographer sat so he got a good look at the blonde. "Chase the femme, or something like that," said Ward, and made a note of it.

There was a sudden silence in the room as Ward's words died away. Johnny was too dazed to say anything. The blonde was so much like the girl he was certain he must have dreamed of meeting all his life, the sight of her left him dumbfounded.

Slowly she walked toward him. He stood motionless—waiting. The three other men silently watched, as did Mr. Bruin.

"Don't you love your little Nancy any longer, Johnny?" she asked anxiously.

Before he could think of a good answer—in fact, before he could think of any answer at all—she flung her arms around his neck and clung to him tightly. "Aren't you going to kiss me?" she demanded.

She lifted her face and Johnny kissed her squarely on the mouth. He had intended to be polite and impersonal about it, but the feel of her soft body nestling close against his own, the touch of her lips, made the kiss quite a production.

Carson sighed and looked wistful—which was quite a feat with his face. Ward even forgot to make a note of it. Drake apparently didn't approve. Mr. Bruin just watched.

"Nancy, darling," Johnny said as he released her and she stepped back from him. He liked the sound of it. He hoped saying such things would become a habit from now on. "I'm so sorry I left you waiting for me."

"I still remember you and the dame checked in last night as Mr. and Mrs. John W. Morton from Baltimore, Maryland," said Carson. "And it worries me—about the rooms, I mean. It's not right. You have eleven fifty-two and this happens to be eleven-fifteen."

"Of course we checked in as Mr. and Mrs. Morton," said Nancy; "after all, we are married, aren't we, Sweetie Pie?"

"Naturally," said Johnny, looking at Nancy admiringly. He couldn't remember a thing about it, but it seemed a nice idea. "Angel Face."

"All very nice," said Drake a bit coldly. "If you two are married—and mind you, I'm not saying you aren't, at least not yet." He looked hard at Johnny. "But just why did you leave your bride and go to bed in this room where a couple of murders have been committed?"

"Murders?" Nancy shuddered and looked at Drake anxiously. "You mean someone has been killed in this room?"

"Now, now, Mrs. Morton," said Ward. "Let's not have the dumb blonde routine; I've met lots of them, and they're not dumb."

"Then you gentlemen are police?" asked Nancy.

"This is Captain Drake of Homicide," said Johnny. "This is Mr. Ward, the captain's assistant, and this is Mr. Carson, the hotel detective." Johnny discovered the brown bear was standing motionless, staring at Nancy. "And this is Mr. Bruin."

MR. BRUIN wagged his head, then turned and walked over to the bed he had occupied before. He was still standing erect and walking on his hind feet. He fell onto the bed, stretched out and then sighed and again went to sleep.

"You'd better go find Mr. King and see what he wants done with the bear, Carson," Drake ordered. "I don't imagine the hotel management wants to keep Mr. Bruin as a guest."

"It would be all right with me," said Carson, "but I know Mr. King will object; I like animals, but he doesn't."

The house detective departed, closing the door gently after him. Nancy sat in a chair and Johnny stood beside her. He had the weird impression they looked like an old-fashioned couple about to have their photograph taken.

"Now just why did you leave your bride, Mr. Morton?" Drake asked, starting to drop down on the other twin bed, then he looked at Mr. Bruin and sat in a chair. Obviously the captain was not a trusting soul. "I think you'd better explain."

"That's the trouble—I can't," said

Johnny worriedly. "I told you I haven't been able to remember anything that happened before I woke up in this room this morning."

"You dear, foolish boy," said Nancy; "and all because of me."

"Because of you?" said Drake. "What do you mean, Mrs. Morton?"

"It was our wedding night," said Nancy. "We'd gone to our room, and then Johnny's partners phoned. They said they were down in the grill and insisted we have a couple of drinks with them. Johnny thought it was a good idea, but I refused."

"Go on, Mrs. Morton," said Drake as Nancy paused.

"Johnny and I quarreled about it," Nancy continued. "He insisted he was going down and have a drink with his partners whether I came along or not. I told him if he did, not to come back, that I never wanted to see him again."

"Then your husband did leave you, Mrs. Morton?" Drake asked.

"That's right." Nancy nodded; "and he was so mad he took his traveling bag with him—well, one of them anyway. I was tempted to go see my Uncle Jeff and tell him the whole thing. You see my uncle also lives at this hotel."

"Your Uncle Jeff?" Drake said. "What's his full name?"

"Why, Jeffery Marshall," said Nancy. "I'm his only living relative."

Johnny gasped and went over and sank weakly down in a chair, but he was careful to pick one where he could look at Nancy. The captain scowled, and Ward sat with pencil poised in the air.

"What's the matter?" Nancy demanded anxiously. "You all look so strange."

"I'm afraid we have bad news for you, Mrs. Morton," Drake said, his voice surprisingly gentle. "Two men were found murdered in this room this morning, and one of them was Jeffery Marshall."

"Oh, no!" Nancy gasped, her blue eyes filling with tears. "Not Uncle Jeff!"

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JOHNNY felt strangely protective as he watched Nancy struggling to control her grief and shock. That they were married was news to him; yet she made it seem so convincing, he was beginning to believe it himself. That she apparently knew his partners, and had objected to his going down and having a drink with them on his wedding night, sounded as if it was true. Johnny felt that if he had quarreled with a girl as attractive as this at such a time, then he must be one of the biggest idiots in the world.

"Would you mind telling me just what happened?" Nancy asked as she grew calmer. "I mean about the—the murders. You said there were two men killed, didn't you, Captain?"

"I did," said Drake, glancing at the police stenographer. "Give her what we've got on it, Tom."

"All right, Captain." Ward turned back the pages of his notebook and began to read. "At eight-thirty this morning room service received a call from a Mr. Bruin requesting a bottle of scotch and a bottle of soda and a bowl of cracked ice be sent to room eleven-fifteen. A bellboy named Eddie Doyle brought up the order. According to Doyle's story Mr. Morton opened the door when the bellboy knocked. Mr. Morton was clad in his pajamas at the time. When Doyle saw the bear he became alarmed and departed, leaving the scotch and soda on the table."

"It's still there," said Drake. "Go on, Tom."

"Doyle reported the presence of the bear and Mr. Morton in room eleven-fifteen to Dan Carson, the house detective," Ward went on reading from his notes. "Then Mr. Carson came up to investigate. He found Mr. Morton fully dressed, found the bodies and phoned the police."

"May I say something?" demanded Johnny.

"Of course, darling," said Nancy before anyone else could speak. "Please do."

"Yes, do," Drake said dryly.

"After Doyle left in a hurry, all in a flutter because he thought the bear had phoned down for the scotch," said Johnny, "the phone rang; I answered it. I told you this before, Captain, but I want to repeat it. A man's voice said, 'Look in the closet' and then hung up before I could ask who was on the wire."

"You did mention that before," said Drake, "but I didn't pay much attention. Did you recognize the voice?"

"No, I didn't," said Johnny. "At first I refused to look in the closet—"

"Why?" interrupted the captain.

"Because I'd already discovered a bear sleeping in the bed next to me," Johnny said; "I was afraid there might be lions or tigers in there."

"That seems logical," said Ward. "I've often felt that way about closets."

"What did you do next, Morton?" Drake asked.

"I decided to get dressed," said Johnny. "So I opened my bag to get my shaving kit, and then I saw a knife—"

"What?" demanded Drake, leaping to his feet.

"I saw a blood-stained knife in the bag," said Johnny. "It's probably still there; I'm certain I never owned such a weapon."

Drake hastily opened the bag. The knife was still resting on top of what had been one of Johnny's clean white shirts. The Captain stared at the vicious-looking weapon, but he was careful not to touch it.

"I didn't touch the knife," Johnny said. "I'm sure someone must have planted it there, and I didn't want my fingerprints on it."

There was a knock on the door of the room. Drake closed the bag with the murder weapon still in it, then walked over and opened the door. Two men stood there. They were both quietly but nicely dressed. One of them was tall, dark and middle-aged, the other was small, red-headed and younger.

"Hello, Johnny," he said. "Barry and I got here as quickly as we could after I talked to you on the phone. What's this stuff about dead men in the closet?"

JOHNNY realized the new arrivals must be his partners, Mark Farrell and Barry Lanceford, but to his horror he didn't recognize either of them. He found he didn't want the police to know that—at least, not yet.

He knew this would be a real test as far as Nancy was concerned. If his partners didn't know the pretty blonde, then the whole story Nancy had been telling the police about her marriage to Johnny would blow up with a loud bang.

"Hello, Barry," Nancy said calmly. "Hello, Mark."

"Hi, Nancy," said Mark Farrell. "How's the bride?"

"Gosh," said Johnny softly and blissfully, gazing at Nancy, "I guess we really are married."

Dazed but delighted, Johnny watched his partners step into the room, closing the door after them. He found himself thinking he'd probably like these two if he knew them better; then he realized that he doubtlessly knew them very well, when he wasn't suffering from such a complete loss of memory.

Barry Lanceford was tall, hawk-faced, with thick black hair with a little

gray in it. Mark Farrell appeared to be just a friendly wiry little redhead, who was probably a lot smarter than he looked. He discovered the scotch and soda, poured himself a drink, and took a long swallow of it.

"Let's have it, Johnny," he said, holding the drink in his hand. "What's this stuff about being mixed up in a couple of murders?"

"I am," said Johnny.

"If you two gentlemen don't mind," said Drake in an official tone. "I'm Captain Drake of Homicide and I'd like to ask a few questions."

"Go ahead," said Farrell. "I'm Mark Farrell and this is Barry Lanceford."

"What do you know about the bear, Mr. Farrell?" Drake asked. "When you talked to Mr. Morton over the phone, you seemed to feel it was quite a joke."

"It doesn't seem funny now, Captain." Farrell took another sip of his drink and glanced at Mr. Bruin, who was still sleeping. "I guess I'd better tell you the whole story. Around midnight last night, Lanceford and I came here—after we learned that our partner, Johnny Morton, had registered at the Park Towers with his bride."

"How did you learn that Mr. and Mrs. Morton arrived here last night?" Drake asked.

"Morton phoned the office," said Lanceford. "He'd been in Baltimore for the past three weeks, spending a vacation in Maryland. Farrell and I were out when Morton called, but he left a message asking us to drop around to the hotel last night and meet his bride, the former Nancy Parker."

So we came here last night," said Farrell. "I phoned up to their room and invited Johnny and his bride to have a drink with us in the grill. Johnny said they'd be right down, but it was nearly half an hour before he finally showed up alone carrying his suitcase. Johnny told us he'd had a fight with his bride. Barry and I'd had a few drinks while we were waiting. We felt sad about Nancy not coming down to meet us."

"It was my wedding night," said Nancy, "and I didn't want to share Johnny with anyone."

"Personally I think Johnny was a fool to have left you, Nancy," said Farrell as he finished his drink and poured himself another. "I wouldn't have done it."

"Then what happened?" asked Drake. "Go on, Mr. Farrell."

"Okay," said Farrell, taking a long sip of his drink. "To make it short, Johnny, Barry and I got pretty well stewed. Finally Johnny decided he was going back to his bride, and that we must come along so Nancy could forgive all three of us."

"Charming idea," said Nancy; "how I would have loved that."

"We took the elevator to the eleventh floor," Farrell went on. "As we were going along the hall we saw the door of this room was open. Barry and I glanced in and saw the bear sleeping in one of the twin beds."

"There was no one else here then?" interrupted Drake.

"We didn't see anyone," said Farrell. "As I said before, we were all pretty tight. Barry and I thought it would be a swell joke if we put Johnny to bed in this room, so he would wake up and find the bear sleeping in the next bed."

"More fun!" Johnny said dryly.

AT THE MOMENT he was not overly fond of his partners. The way Mark Farrell kept drinking the Scotch made Johnny wonder if the little redhead was an habitual drunk. Barry Lanceford sat in a chair, looking like a judge hearing the facts in a case.

"Just about then Johnny passed out cold," Farrell went on, "so we undressed him and put him to bed in this room in his pajamas." The redhead scowled. "Now who was murdered, and how did it happen?"

"Jefferey Marshall, and a younger man we've not yet been able to identify,

were found on the floor of the closet in this room," said Drake. "They both had been stabbed in the heart. According to the assistant medical examiner's report the double murder occurred at least eight hours before the bodies were discovered, for rigor mortis had set in. Which places the time of the crime around midnight last night."

"I'm sure we came up to this floor with Johnny much later than that" said Farrell; "it must have been after one o'clock in the morning. What's the rest of it, Captain?"

"A blood-stained knife that is doubtlessly the murder weapon was found in John Morton's traveling bag," said Ward, glancing up from his notebook. "The younger man was blond, about five feet eleven and weighed about a hundred and sixty pounds."

"Did he have a slight scar under his right ear?" Nancy asked.

"He did," said Drake. "Do you know him, Mrs. Morton?"

"Why, yes, I'm afraid I do," Nancy said slowly. "That must be Lester Booth; he was Uncle Jeff's private secretary." She got to her feet. Johnny stood up, watching her anxiously, but she refused to look at him. "May I go to my room now, Captain?" she asked. "All this has been quite a shock and I'm a bit unnerved."

"Of course, Mrs. Morton," Drake said quietly. "I'll see you later, if there are any more questions."

"There will be," said Ward sadly; "there always are."

"You knew Lester Booth?" Drake asked casually, as Nancy reached for the knob of the closed door.

"Yes, quite well," said Nancy. "Lester thought he was in love with me, though I didn't feel the same way about him." She turned and looked at the men in the room. "Uncle Jeff threatened to disinherit me if I married Johnny Morton. My uncle was going to change his will, but I don't believe he got a chance to do it." Her lip quivered and she looked young, appealing and frightened. "And Johnny was terribly jealous of Lester."

Nancy's words seemed to linger as she turned and opened the door and stepped out into the hall, closing the door behind her. With her departure something bright and vivid was gone from the room.

JOHNNY SANK weakly into a chair. His two partners stared at him as if he was someone they didn't know well, or didn't like particularly. He didn't know whether he liked them, either—he still couldn't remember. He felt completely helpless. In his estimation, what Nancy had just said made him the perfect murder suspect. He waited for Captain Drake to tell him he was under arrest yet dreaded to hear the words.

"I don't like it, Captain," Ward said thoughtfully, "I think it's all too pat."

"So do I." Drake went to the traveling bag, opened it, wrapped the murder weapon in the blood-stained white shirt and drew the bundle out. He turned to Johnny. "With all the evidence against you I should place you under arrest on a charge of suspicion of murder, Morton."

"I guess you should, Captain," Johnny said weakly.

Farrell sighed and poured himself another drink. Lanceford began to pace the floor, sniffing the air like a hound dog.

"But I'm not going to do it yet," said Drake; "naturally you won't be fool enough to try and leave town."

"Of course not," said Johnny, relief sweeping over him. "You can find me any time you want me, Captain."

"When I think of that poor little girl waiting for Johnny to come back, it makes me sad," said Farrell. "Even if she did finally come downstairs and find Barry and me having a nightcap in the grill, after we left Johnny here with the bear—"

"What's that about Mrs. Morton coming down to the grill?" Drake interrupted tersely.

"Nancy came down to the grill," Farrell said. "I remember that—we talked to her and to a thin, dark-haired guy with a mustache who said he was the hotel manager. Barry was so drunk he didn't say a word when Nancy asked about Johnny. I was going to tell her, but I got sick—something I ate, no doubt—and I forgot all about it."

"All right, Lanceford," said Drake sternly. "Did Mrs. Morton come down to the grill?"

"She did," said Lanceford. "She asked where her husband was and I told her we didn't know—that he had left us."

"You have the nicest partners, Morton," said Ward, looking at Johnny.

"What happened after you told Mrs. Morton you didn't know where she could find her husband, Lanceford?" Drake asked.

"She left the grill and apparently returned to her room." Lanceford again started pacing the floor and sniffing. "Strange—have you noticed it, Captain?"

"Noticed what?" demanded Drake.

"There's a faint, but unmistakable odor of violets in this room," Lanceford said. "Doubtlessly the scent of perfume left by some woman who has been here."

"Mrs. Morton just left," said Ward.

"I know," said Lanceford, "but the perfume she wears is quite faint, and seems more like lilac than anything else." There was a frown on the hawk-like face of the tall attorney. "I suggest you look for a dark, rather exotic woman."

"All right, we'll look," said Ward, closing his notebook and rising. "While we're doing that, you three find out why two murdered men were placed in the closet. Who put the bear in this room, and why. Also why Carson hasn't come back to tell us what the management wants done with Mr. Bruin. Who phoned Morton, and later the house detective, and told them both to look in the closet."

"Right," said Captain Drake. "And why Mrs. Morton didn't tell us she had left her room last night; and who placed the murder weapon in Johnny Morton's traveling bag. When you learn all that, do tell us; we'll be glad to know."

"You'll also probably learn a policeman's lot is not a happy one," said Ward. "Shall we go, Captain?"

"We shall." Drake headed for the door, the stout man close behind him. "In my estimation, Lanceford, you and Farrell are each as much of a murder suspect as is Johnny Morton—so don't leave town."

THEN THE door closed behind the two homicide men. Silence lingered in the room like a last guest who hated to admit the party was over. Mark Farrell made a weird gurgling sound as he swallowed part of the drink in his hand. Then he slumped down in his chair and held the glass out in front of him at arm's length. It appeared to be part of a balancing act he had just invented.

"They didn't like us," Farrell muttered.

The half-filled glass slipped out of his fingers, dropped to the floor and broke. He still held his right arm extended as he stared dully at the damp spot the liquor made on the rug. Then Farrell started to lean to the left. He kept right on leaning until he fell off the chair and landed on the floor with a thud. He mumbled something, rolled over and went sound asleep.

"Why does he do it?" Lanceford asked. "He knows that after four or five drinks he either gets very sick or passes out. The whole thing shows a complete lack of will-power that's interesting from a medical standpoint."

"Yes, Doctor," Johnny said. "I mean, yes, Barry, you're quite right."

The phone suddenly rang. Johnny jumped to his feet and glared at it.

"Unusual reaction," Lanceford said. "Indication of tense nerves, and a desire to hide a feeling of guilt shown by being startled by common-place objects."

"Nuts!" said Johnny, walking over and picking up the phone. "Hello, Johnny Morton speaking."

"Johnny," said a feminine voice over the wire, "this is Nancy. I must see you at once, darling."

"All right," Johnny said. "I'll be there right away; where are you?"

"In our room—eleven-fifty two, and it's still lonesome without you here, Johnny."

"Be there in a moment, darling," Johnny said, and hung up.

"Where are you going, Morton?" Lanceford asked as Johnny headed for the door.

"My wife wants me," Johnny said, hand on the doorknob.

"You mean you're going to leave here with this drunk and the bear?" Lanceford demanded anxiously. "You can't do that!"

"Oh, yes, I can," said Johnny firmly. "Leaving people with the bear was your idea in the first place; try it yourself and see how you like it."

He stepped out into the hall, closing the door firmly behind him, before Lanceford could say anything further.

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THREE AND a quarter minutes latter Johnny Morton knocked on the closed door of room 1152.

"Come in," he heard Nancy call. It sounded beautiful, even muffled by a closed door.

Johnny opened the door and stepped into the room. Nancy stood gazing at him, and she seemed worried about something. Johnny felt it was foolish of her; he was quite willing to forgive her for acting as if she thought he had murdered her uncle and Lester Booth.

Behind him the door closed quietly, but Johnny paid no attention. Doubtlessly the wind had shut the door, though he didn't feel any breeze. Johnny opened his mouth to speak, to voice what he was sure Nancy would consider a sweet little speech, but he remained silent.

"We must be quiet about this, Mr. Morton," said a deep masculine voice behind him, and he felt a hard object jabbed against his back. He had the sickening feeling it was the barrel of a gun. "The other guests, you know."

Johnny glanced over his shoulder and found himself staring at a face that reminded him of a men's clothing store dummy with a black mustache and black hair.

"I'm sorry, Johnny," Nancy said; "he made me do it. He's Stanton King, the hotel manager."

"My apologies, Mr. Morton," King said, but he didn't sound the least bit sorry about anything. "I realize I'm imposing on you and Mrs. Morton, but this has to be done. Please hand over the collection of unset diamonds you found in Mr. Marshall's room."

"You're crazy," said Johnny impatiently. "I don't know anything about any diamonds."

"Afraid that might be your attitude," King said. "I'd hoped you wouldn't be difficult." The hard object jabbed Johnny's back again. "This is a loaded gun I'm holding."

Johnny hadn't the slightest doubt of it—the hotel manager's words were not in the least reassuring. Stanton King sounded as if he might use the gun at any moment. It wasn't a comfortable feeling.

"Walk forward until I tell you to turn around, Mr. Morton," King commanded; "go ahead."

Johnny started walking straight ahead. He was half-way to the spot

where Nancy stood, still looking quite unhappy. Then the hotel manager spoke again. "Now turn around."

Johnny halted and swung around. He was now about to get a full-length view of Stanton King and didn't care much for what he saw. The hotel manager was about half a head shorter than Johnny's six-feet-two. He was dressed in a dark coat, striped gray trousers, white shirt and dark tie and there was a white carnation in the buttonhole of the left lapel of his coat. Johnny liked the flower much better than the automatic in King's right hand.

"It'll be much simpler if you'll give me the diamonds, Mr. Morton," King said in a tone he doubtlessly used to placate complaining guests. "Hate to use crude methods such as this. Goes against my better nature."

"What diamonds are you talking about?" Johnny asked.

"He appears to be after Uncle Jeff's collection of unset diamonds, Johnny," Nancy said. "Uncle always carried them with him; he claimed they were valued at a quarter of a million dollars. Don't you remember? He showed them to us when we were all at Mazie Tillingham's house in Baltimore just three days ago."

How nice, Johnny thought. *Nothing like the help of a loving wife at a time like this. If King isn't positive I have the diamonds he's a bigger fool than I think.*

"You know where those diamonds are, Morton," said King; "I must have them. I'm in financial difficulties, and know a place where I can sell the diamonds and clear up my debts. Hand them over."

"Suppose I refuse to give you the diamonds," Johnny asked, staring at the sunlight coming in through the closed windows of the room. "What happens then?"

"I'm a desperate man." King moved the automatic so it pointed at Nancy. "I might be forced to kill Mrs. Morton, then shoot you, and make it look like murder and suicide."

"I wouldn't like that," said Nancy; "It's no way to spend a honeymoon."

"All right, King," Johnny said resignedly. "I'll give you the diamonds. They're in a false heel in my right shoe."

"Clever of you," King said; "smart man, Morton."

"Yes, isn't he," said Nancy, wandering over to the bureau. "I'm learning a lot about you, darling."

"Have to take off the shoe to get the heel open," Johnny said, sitting in a chair near one of the windows. "There's a trick to it."

"Naturally," said King.

HE MOVED closer and watched in fascination as Johnny unlaced the tan oxford on his right foot. Nancy was behind King examining a heavy dressing and makeup case on the bureau.

"Let's see," said Johnny, shoe in hand. "This hidden compartment is a knockout, though a bit hard to open."

"Sounds fascinating," said Nancy, picking up the dressing case and walking toward King.

Abruptly Johnny flung the shoe at the nearest window. There was a loud crash as it broke the glass, then dropped back inside the room. King's language was unbecoming to a hotel manager. Behind him Nancy raised the dressing case and brought it down on King's head with all her strength. King's knees buckled and the automatic slid from his fingers as he dropped to the floor unconscious.

"Sorry, Mr. King," Nancy said, watching Johnny leap to his feet and grab up the gun. "I hate to be so crude."

"That's my girl," Johnny said, smiling at Nancy proudly.

"When you suggested a knockout I couldn't resist."

Johnny examined King. The hotel manager was out cold, and looked as

if he might remain that way for sometime.

"So far, much better than I expected." Johnny stood up dropped the automatic into the side pocket of his coat. "But I've a feeling our troubles have just started; someone will report the broken window, and our dear pal Dan Carson will investigate."

"Put your shoe back on and take off one of Mr. King's," said Nancy. "It would be nice to tell the house detective Mr. King threw his shoe through the window. Don't you think so, darling?"

"Brains as well as beauty," said Johnny, as he got his shoe and put it back on. "Aren't the Morton men lucky in the women they marry."

"You're just saying that because it's true," said Nancy with a smile as she put the dressing case back on the bureau. "The Morton men are pretty nice, too."

Johnny knelt down and quickly took off King's right shoe, then dropped it by the broken window. There was a knock on the closed door of the room. Johnny looked at Nancy, who nodded.

"Enter Carson, leering," she said softly.

The knock was repeated. It was loud and firm, and pretty much the banging type. Doubtlessly the sort of knock that could be expected from a house detective. Johnny opened the door.

"Who broke the window?" Carson loomed in the doorway, close to two hundred pounds of unattractiveness. "We don't permit stuff like that in this hotel."

JOHNNY stepped aside and the house detective entered the room. Carson blinked when he saw Stanton King lying on the floor, still unconscious. "What happened here?"

"Just what we're trying to find out." Johnny closed the door and circled around Carson as he would an elephant he didn't trust. "A little while ago Mr. King knocked on our door. Being public spirited citizens we let him in."

"We're always like that," Nancy said; "at the wedding they said we were the most attractive couple."

"What did Mr. King want?" Carson asked, going over and finding the hotel manager was merely unconscious.

"He was raving about the hotel's reputation, and told us to get out," said Johnny. "That we gave the place a bad name. Something about us sent Mr. King into a wild rage, and he did the silliest thing. He took off his shoe and threw it at the window."

"I could have told him he'd break something," said Nancy. "Besides things like that are hard on shoes."

"Sounds like King, all right," said Carson; "the guy's crazy. Who knocked him out?"

"He was hobbling around with one shoe off when he slipped and fell," Nancy said quickly, before Johnny could think of any good answers. "He hit his head on the floor and it knocked him out."

There was a thoughtful look on Carson's square face. As usual he was wearing his hat. Johnny wasn't sure whether it covered a bald spot or bad manners. Carson fumbled for his necktie, which was the nude lady painted on a green background, and both looked a bit seasick.

"Guess I'd better get the boss out of here," Carson said. "He has hangovers that don't show, but they are pips. At such times Mr. King is not himself, and personally I like him better that way." The house detective looked at Johnny. "Would you mind helping me carry him to a vacant room along the hall, Mr. Morton?"

"I'll be delighted," said Johnny eagerly. "But we better put his shoe back on." He did so quickly. "All right, Carson, you take his shoulders and I'll take his legs."

"And I'll be in Scotland before ye," Nancy said dreamily.

She opened the door as the two men picked up the unconscious hotel manager. Johnny and Carson went along the hall until they came to room 1126. The door stood ajar, and Carson shoved it wide open with his shoulder. They carried King into the obviously vacant room and placed him on the neatly made up bed. In his unconscious state, he looked more like a clothing store dummy than ever.

"Thanks, Mr. Morton," Carson said. "I'll take care of him. That will be all; sorry you had so much bother."

Johnny departed and entered room 1152 just as Nancy came out of the connecting bath. Then he locked the door from the inside.

"Why, Mr. Morton," Nancy said, as she watched him. "I'll have you know I'm a nice girl."

"Nice isn't the word for it," Johnny said; "I think you're simply wonderful."

"You're pretty swell yourself," Nancy said, sitting on the ege of one of the twin beds. The one that had been slept in. "I thought you'd be mad at me after the way I acted when the police were questioning us, Johnny."

"Why should I be?" Johnny sat in a chair. "I suppose it was natural for you to suspect I might have murdered our uncle and Lester Booth."

"It wasn't natural at all," Nancy said. "Those men made me nervous and I said things I shouldn't have. I—I feel terrible about Uncle Jeff and Lester. It doesn't seem possible."

"Let's not talk about it now," Johnny said soothingly. "I feel badly, too."

HE HADN'T forgotten he was still a definite murder suspect as far as Captain Drake and the police were concerned and he preferred to think about it as little as possible now.

"There've been times this morning when I thought you didn't really believe we're married, darling," Nancy said, an anxious, pleading look in her blue eyes. "We are, you know; we were married at Mazie Tillingham's house in Baltimore at two o'clock yesterday afternoon."

"Of course," said Johnny, delighted to find he really was beginning to remember. "It was a quiet wedding, with just Mazie and a few friends there. Am I right about that?"

"You are," said Nancy in a tone of relief. "Just think—we met for the first time three weeks ago when you came to spend your vacation with Mazie in Baltimore. She was just finishing the sixth detective novel she's written—"

"Sixth?" interrupted Johnny. "I thought she'd only done four, and are they tripe! I had to read every one of them. All in the family, since Mazie's my second cousin on my mother's side."

"I know," said Nancy. "I was Mazie's private secretary and did all the typing of the final drafts of her books for her. In case your memory is still hazy I was staying at the house when you arrived, and of course we met. Then a terrible thing happened."

"What?" Johnny asked anxiously.

"We fell in love," Nancy said. "And to think Mazie gave me such a buildup I mentally listed you as the one man I was sure I wouldn't even like." She smiled softly. "Was I wrong about that!"

Johnny slowly got to his feet, walked over and seated himself on the edge of the bed beside Nancy. She sighed softly and snuggled close against him as he put his arm around her. There was the faint scent of lilacs and she was soft and young and lovely nestling there.

"I've been so lonesome for you, darling," she said.

She lifted her head; their lips met in a long kiss.

Nancy ran her slender fingers through his thick dark hair, clinging to him as though she never wanted to let him go. Then abruptly she drew back, blue eyes wide as she gazed at him. "Where did you get that big lump on

the top of your head?" she demanded. "Did someone hit you last night?"

"Lump? What do you mean?"

He felt around on top of his head and found she was right. There was a lump there, and it was still a bit painful to the touch.

"That's it!" he said. "Why I lost my memory for a time this morning. Someone must have socked me so hard it did something to my brain."

"Oh, Johnny," Nancy said, again moving close to him. "My poor, darling."

He kissed her again, holding her tightly.

"You know what?" Nancy drew away from him, suddenly breathless and shy. "I'm hungry—I haven't had any breakfast yet." She glanced at her wrist-watch. "And it's twenty minutes after eleven."

"Come to think of it, I'm hungry, too." Johnny tried to sound casual, but his voice was a bit shaky. "I haven't had any breakfast either."

NANCY STOOD up, smoothing down her dress, slender and golden in the sunlight. For the first time Johnny noticed the platinum and diamond wedding and engagement rings on the third finger of her left hand. "We could have room service send breakfast up for us."

"I'd like that," Johnny said, getting to his feet. "Only there's a chance of Stanton King coming back here when he recovers consciousness, as he's probably done by now."

"The door is locked," Nancy said; "he can't get in."

"I know." Johnny frowned. "But as hotel manager he must have a pass key to all the rooms. That man is dangerous—completely insane on the subject of getting those diamonds I haven't got, or know anything about."

"You make it sound frightening." Nancy looked anxious. "I guess we'd better have breakfast in the dining room; I doubt that Mr. King will be fool enough to bother us there."

"Then let's go."

"All right. Wait until I make sure I look nice."

Nancy combed and brushed her blonde hair and refreshed her makeup. Satisfied, she turned from the mirror and looked at Johnny.

"Your hair could stand brushing, darling," she said. "Your comb and brush are right there on the bureau; I found them in your other bag after you walked out on me last night."

"Fool that I was." Johnny walked over to the bureau. "I'll never forgive myself."

"Then I will." Nancy laughed. "Just so long as we keep it in the family." Her expression grew serious. "Had you better see a doctor about that lump on your head?"

"Don't believe it's necessary," Johnny said as he brushed his hair. "I can remember everything now. Even the dress you wore when I first met you at Mazie's house. It was pink."

"As a matter of fact it was powder blue," said Nancy. "I'll always keep it pressed away in my memory book with the very dead cricket that Willie Tupper gave me as a tender token of his affection on my tenth birthday."

"I shall now be madly jealous of Willie Tupper," said Johnny as he put down the brush, and they went to the door. "Willie knew you long before I did."

"True," said Nancy. "And I never did quite know what to do with Willie or the cricket." She stepped out into the corridor as Johnny held the door open. He followed and locked the door from the outside. "I wonder if the couple I saw walking down the hall near room eleven-fifteen last night could be the murderers."

Johnny just stood staring at her, too amazed to ask any questions.

-5-

THE HEADWAITER in the Park Towers dining room wore the smile he reserved for brides and grooms as he led Mr. and Mrs. Morton to a quiet table. There were few people in the room, for it was late for breakfast and a bit early for lunch. The headwaiter disappeared to be replaced by another waiter who stood, pad and pencil in hand, ready to take their order.

"Can we still get breakfast, waiter?" Nancy asked.

"C e r t a i n l y, Madam," said the waiter. "Breakfast is served until twelve-thirty." He glanced at his wristwatch. "It is now eleven-fifty six and a quarter."

"Good," said Nancy; "that's so nice to know. I'll have orange juice, scrambled eggs, buttered toast and coffee."

"I'll take the same," Johnny said.

Johnny discovered that, from where they sat he and Nancy could look out through the wide entrance doorway of the dining room into the hotel lobby. There were quite a few people out there, and the room clerk was busy behind the desk. The waiter wrote down the order and departed.

"Now what about the couple you saw, darling?" Johnny asked.

"After you left me to go down and have a drink with those partners of yours last night, I stepped out into the corridor. I was just in time to see a dark-haired woman and a tall man walking down the hall toward the elevators. Their backs were toward me so I couldn't see their faces, but the man had on a brown suit with a light pinstripe. I'm sure I'd recognize that suit if I saw it again. They got into an elevator and were gone before I got a good look at them."

"Then what?"

"I took a walk along the hall," Nancy said. "I reached the door of eleven-fifteen and found it half open. I looked in and saw the figures of what appeared to be two men lying on the floor. The only light in the room came from the adjoining bath, so I didn't get a good look at the men."

"Jeepers!"

"And creepers," said Nancy; "I was scared stiff—so frightened I didn't even scream. I just headed back to our room as fast as I could get there. I hadn't the faintest idea those two men were Uncle Jeff and Lester Booth, as they must have been. I locked the door of our room and just sat on the edge of the bed shivering."

"Did you see the bear?" Johnny asked.

"Who looks for bears at a time like that?" demanded Nancy. "I never was much of a hunter, anyway."

"What time was it when you saw the two bodies?" Johnny asked, sounding so much like an attorney questioning a witness he was surprised to realize he actually was one. "Do you remember?"

"You walked out on me at ten minutes to twelve, which is no time to leave a bride," said Nancy. "It must have been about midnight when I saw the couple go along the hall, and then saw the bodies as you so gracefully and gruesomely put it."

The waiter appeared with their orders, placed them on the table, and then went away again.

"Captain Drake thinks the murders took place about midnight according to the medical examiner's report," Johnny said. "What happened after you came back to our room, darling?"

"Nothing—and pretty dull it was, too. I waited about half an hour; then found I couldn't stand being alone any longer, and went down to the lobby looking for you."

"Did you notice any change in room eleven-fifteen?"

"I didn't even look again," said Nancy. "I went past that door in a hurry and rang for the elevator without once looking back. When I got down in the lobby, Stanton King saw me and came up and introduced himself. There's a man who thinks he has a way with ladies, but it's not my way, and I'm not that kind of a lady. He tagged right along when I went into the grill looking for you and your dear partners."

"How'd you find Barry and Mark when you'd never seen them before?"

"YOU DESCRIBED them in boring detail down in Baltimore." said Nancy, "when I'd much rather you'd talked about me or even us. They weren't hard to find, refused to tell me where you were, and proved more drunk than interesting, so I finally came back upstairs to our room. I noticed the door of eleven-fifteen was closed as I went by. I wondered if I should have told Mr. King about the figures on the floor, then decided I wouldn't tell him it was raining."

"Then what?"

"Then I phoned Mazie Tillingham long distance and told her what had happened," said Nancy as she finished her scrambled eggs. "I metioned the men on the floor in one of my madder moments. Mazie announced she was arriving here around noon today to take complete care of the situation."

"Oh, my, I sense trouble coming by B and O," said Johnny sadly. "You know how Mazie loves to run things and has always considered herself very clever in solving real crimes. With the help of Miss Tillingham, anything is likely to happen and probably will."

"There he is!" Nancy said abruptly, staring out into the lobby.

"Who?"

"The man I saw in the hall with the dark-haired woman last night," Nancy said excitedly. "At least he's wearing the same brown pin-striped suit. See him standing there talking to the room clerk at the desk?"

"I do," said Johnny, studying a tall thin man in a brown suit that had a light pin stripe weaved into it. "Stay here and finish your breakfast and I'll try and find out that man's name."

"What happens then?"

"I trail him and find out all I can about him; then I report to Captain Drake and let him take over from there."

"All right," said Nancy. "But you'd better get going, my love, before the man in brown goes hence without you."

"Have you any money?" Johnny asked as he rose from the table.

"Only the hundred dollars Mazie gave me as a wedding present. That and four dollars and seventy-two cents in small change. Why, if I may be so bold?"

"Wanted to be sure you had enough to pay for our breakfasts," said Johnny. "I'll be back as soon as possible, Angel Child; wait for me."

"I will." Nancy smiled at him. "Though it's becoming an old family custom. Always the Morton women must wait."

"And the men must run," said Johnny.

He strolled casually out of the dining room into the lobby just as the thin man in the brown suit left the hotel desk and wandered over to the newsstand. Johnny walked to the desk and spoke to the clerk.

"Do you happen to know the name of the gentleman who just left here?" he asked. "His face seems familiar; I think I met him in Chicago, but can't remember his name."

"Why that's Mr. Adam Dabney." The clerk had a long face that made him look like a sad horse. "He and Mrs. Dabney have been guests here for some time. Charming couple."

"That's the name," said Johnny hastily, as he discovered Adam Dabney was heading for the street door; "thanks very much."

Johnny reached the street just in time to see Adam Dabney climb into a cab and slam the door shut. Johnny found there was another taxi standing at the curb and leaped in. "Follow the cab that just pulled out," he told the driver.

"All right," said the driver resignedly as he started the motor and put the cab into gear. "But if you ask me it's pretty early in the day to play games."

"Important business," Johnny said in what he hoped was an impressive tone as he settled back on the rear seat.

"Don't tell me you're a detective," said the driver, as he followed the other cab toward the Eastside. "Could be the sinister character in the cab ahead spots us following him, starts shooting, and what will poor Robin do then?"

"How did Poor Robin get into this?" Johnny asked.

"That's me," said the taxi driver; "Gus Robin. I don't like jobs like this— Not with me being the sole support of my eldest son. Gosh—if I was to get shot or something, he'd have to go to work."

"I'm not a detective," said Johnny. "I'm an attorney."

"In that case, chasing the guy in the cab ahead ain't cricket," said Robin. "Maybe he's changed his mind, decided to go back to his wife, and doesn't want you to handle the divorce case after all."

"YOU KNOW, I never thought of that," Johnny said truthfully. "All the same it's important I talk to Mr. Dabney, so keep following the other cab, please."

"You're welcome," said Robin, as the cab started down Park Avenue. "Are you a gambling man?"

"That depends," Johnny said cautiously. "Why?"

"I'll bet you a buck against double my fare we're headed for Grand Central." Robin laughed. "I sure would like to see that!"

"See what?"

"Suppose your pal takes the Boston Express and you rush up to the engineer of the Stamford Local and say, 'Follow that train!' Boy, wouldn't that be something!"

Johnny laughed politely and decided Gus Robin had a nice sense of humor in a dull sort of way.

Adam Dabney's cab did take him to the Vanderbilt Avenue entrance to Grand Central Depot. Johnny's taxi was right behind; he paid Robin the double fare and got out, walking right by the man in the brown suit and on into the Upper Level. Then he halted and began searching through his pockets as if making sure he hadn't forgotten something.

"Waiting for me?" demanded a cold voice behind him.

Johnny swung around. Adam Dabney stood staring at him, and the thin man in the brown striped suit had a pair of eyes that seemed made of blue ice.

"What makes you think I was waiting for you?" Johnny asked. "I don't even know you."

"That's why I'm curious," Dabney said. "I haven't the faintest idea who you are; yet when I left the hotel and took a taxi to the station, you followed in another cab. What's the idea?"

"I'm John Morton," Johnny said. "Might as well tell you the truth, Mr. Dabney."

"So you know my name," said Dabney. "Go on, Morton; what's the rest of it?"

"I did follow in another cab when you left the Park Towers because I hoped I might get a chance to talk to you," Johnny said.

"About what?" said Dabney, heading toward the stairs leading to the

Lower Level. "You'll have to make it fast. I want to catch the next train to Rye. There's a house out there that Mrs. Dabney and I are considering buying."

"Mrs. Morton and I are also staying at the Park Towers," Johnny said, as he and Dabney went down the steps side by side. "We got mixed up in a double murder in the hotel last night—"

"In what?" Dabney gave him a quick, startled glance.

"A double murder," repeated Johnny. "I wondered if you or Mrs. Dabney might have seen the killer without actually realizing it."

"I see." Dabney's tone was no longer cold. "Glad to do what I can, Mr. Morton, but I'm afraid I won't be much help." He led the way over to one of the long benches against the walls on the Lower Level. "Let's talk it over; it's twenty minutes before the next train leaves for Rye, and I have my ticket."

DABNEY dropped down on the bench and Johnny seated himself beside the man in the brown suit. There was no one else waiting near them.

"My wife and I have room eleven-fourteen at the hotel," said Dabney. "When and where did this double murder take place? I haven't heard a thing about it."

"It happened in room eleven-fifteen around midnight last night," Johnny said. "Strange you didn't hear anything, since you apparently have the room directly across the hall, Mr. Dabney."

"That's true." Dabney frowned. "I don't understand it. Mrs. Dabney and I were in our room until around twelve last night and heard nothing unusual. Then we decided to go down to the grill and have a few drinks, and we met some friends there. We didn't come back up to our room until nearly three in the morning. We went from the grill to a night club."

"Mrs. Morton saw you and Mrs. Dabney as you were going downstairs. It was around twelve then, as you just said, so Nancy and I wondered if you'd seen anything suspicious."

"Tell me who was murdered, and all about it; then I'll have a clearer picture of the whole thing."

Johnny told Dabney the whole story as swiftly and briefly as possible. He merely gave the details about having awakened in the room with the bear and finding the two dead men in the closet. He said nothing about Stanton King, and all of that angle.

"I see," said Adam Dabney when Johnny finished. "With one of the dead men your bride's uncle, you certainly make a good suspect."

"I sure do," said Johnny. "That's why I'm anxious for the real killer to be found soon."

"Naturally." Dabney glanced at the big clock in the center of the Lower Level. "Can't think of a thing that would help you now, Mr. Morton. When Mrs. Dabney and I passed room eleven-fifteen last night, I did notice the door was open a little bit, but the room inside was dark so I saw nothing." He rose to his feet, and Johnny also stood up. "They're just opening the gate to the Stamford Local so I've got to run along. I'll be back at the hotel this evening. If I remember anything vital I'll look you up."

"Thanks very much, Mr. Dabney," said Johnny. "Wouldn't have bothered you if Nancy hadn't told me about the tall man and the dark-haired woman she saw walking along the hall last night."

"Dark-haired woman," Dabney called back over his shoulder as he headed for his train. "But Mrs. Dabney is a blonde."

Johnny just stood staring as Dabney joined the other passengers hurrying through the train gate and disappeared.

-6-

JOHNNY MORTON was a decidedly-puzzled young man as he took another taxi from Grand Central and rode back to the Park Towers. He had a driver who apparently didn't care to converse with the cash customers and that suited Johnny. He wasn't in the mood for idle chatter.

Adam Dabney's last moment revelation that his wife was a blonde was startling. In Johnny's estimation, it could mean the couple Nancy had seen had not been Mr. and Mrs. Dabney; some other man might be wearing a brown pin-striped suit like the one Dabney still had on.

When Johnny reached the hotel lobby he started searching for Nancy, but saw no sign of her. He looked in the dining room, found she wasn't there, and decided she must have gone back to their room.

He took the elevator to the eleventh floor and hurried along the hall. The door of 1115 was closed and he went right by. When he reached 1152, he found the door was also shut so he knocked, though he had the key in his pocket.

"Who is it?" called a husky feminine voice from the other side of the door, and he hoped Nancy hadn't caught a cold.

"It's Johnny, darling," he said, "let me in."

The lock clicked as the door opened. A sultry-looking brunette stood in the doorway staring at Johnny. He gazed at her in amazement. She wore her dark hair cut fairly short; her face was pretty, but a bit hard. She was dressed in red lounging pajamas. She looked Johnny over slowly, from head to foot, then she smiled one of the most intimate and inviting smiles he had ever seen. "Look what Santa Claus brought me," she said. "And it's only August."

"Who are you?" Johnny asked dazedly. "Where's Nancy?"

"I'm Elaine Newell; I never heard of Nancy, but won't I do?"

Johnny stared over Elaine Newell's left shoulder at the room number on the open door. "This is eleven-fifty-two, all right," he said, taking out the room key and checking the number on the brown tag. "Same number."

"Give me that!" Elaine snatched the key out of his hand. "I don't like strangers having keys to my room. You could come barging in whenever you felt like it, and there're times a girl likes to be alone."

"Up until about an hour ago this was *my* room," said Johnny.

"Could be," said Elaine. "I just moved in. The management promised me I could have a bigger room when one was vacant. I heard a couple had this one, but checked out." She stepped closer to him. "Come on in and let's talk it over, Johnny. That's your name, isn't it?"

"That's right," he said. "Johnny Morton."

"Well, come in," Elaine said, stepping back so he could enter. "I don't like standing here with the door open. Someone might see us, and you know how people talk."

Johnny stepped into the room. Elaine closed the door and turned the snap-lock. "This calls for a drink. What'll you have—scotch or Bourbon?"

"Scotch, please," Johnny said.

He watched her as she walked over to a table on which there were bottles, glasses and an ornate silver container which evidently held ice cubes. He was not particularly worried about Nancy. Evidently she had checked out while he had been at Grand Central. Doubtlessly she had left word at the desk where he could find her. He hadn't

thought to ask for her there when he had been searching around the lobby.

"Here's your drink, Johnny," Elaine said, walking over to him with a glass in her hand. "Hope I made it the way you like 'em."

"Thanks." Johnny took the glass she held out to him. "Wonder where my wife went."

"How would I know?"

Johnny took a long drink then put the glass down on the corner of the bureau. Elaine also took a long drink then put her glass down.

"Why worry about your wife?" Elaine said, coming closer to him. "I'm not."

SHE PUT her arms around him, her body pressing close against his own. Johnny felt that he was being smothered in a bed of violets—the scent of them was almost overpowering. He remembered Barry Lanceford pacing the floor of the murder room and sniffing like a hound dog. Again he seemed to hear Lanceford say there was a faint, but unmistakable odor of violets in the room.

"Quit it," Johnny said, his voice hard, "your husband wouldn't like the way you're acting at all."

"My husband!" Elaine released him and stepped back, brown eyes glaring. "What do you mean by that?"

"Figure it out yourself," Johnny said coldly. "What were you doing in room eleven-fifteen last night?"

"Room eleven-fifteen?" Elaine gasped.

"That's right," said Johnny. "The room where Jeffery Marshall and Lester Booth were found murdered."

"So that's it!" Elaine glared at him even harder. "You're a cop! And I thought you just a nice guy looking for a good time with a girl willing to be friendly. Was I a sucker!"

"What were you doing in eleven-fifteen?" Johnny again asked coldly. "The police would like to know about that."

"I wasn't in any eleven-fifteen." Elaine went to the door and unlocked it. "I don't know anything about that room or any murders either." She drew open the door. "Now get out of here and don't ever come back!"

"Suppose I refuse to leave until you tell what you know about those murders?" Johnny asked quietly.

"You stay here another second," snapped Elaine, fumbling with the buttons of her pajama coat, "and I'll take off my clothes, yell bloody murder, and swear you attacked me!"

"I'm going," Johnny said.

He ducked out of the room, closing the door quickly behind him as she grabbed up her glass of scotch, apparently with the intention of throwing it at him.

As he stood in the hall he heard the lock snap. He breathed a sigh of relief and mopped his face with a handkerchief when he realized she evidently wasn't coming after him. In his estimation Elaine Newell was a dangerous woman in more ways than one.

He hurried back along the hall, got into an elevator as it stopped at his floor, then descended to the lobby. He spotted Dan Carson standing at the hotel desk talking to the horse-faced room clerk and walked over to them.

"Hello, Mr. Morton," Carson said. "I hear that Mrs. Morton checked out a little while ago."

"Did she leave any messages for me?" Johnny asked, looking at the room clerk.

"Why, yes, Mr. Morton," said the clerk. "She said she would be at the Eastside Hotel." He looked shocked. "Everyone to their own taste, of course."

"Thanks," said Johnny as he turned away.

He walked a few feet then halted and stood gazing in fascination at the procession entering the lobby from the street door. First came a small, smartly dressed woman carrying a large handbag in her right hand and a leather

brief-case in her left. Behind her came three bellboys. One carried two tan suitcases, another a bag big enough to be a small trunk, while the third carried a portable typewriter case in each hand.

"Enter Miss Mazie Tillingham in all her glory," said Johnny. "And apparently determined to spend their honeymoon with Mr. and Mrs. Johnny Morton. Which is more than Johnny and Nancy appear to be able to do with each other."

MAZIE DISCOVERED Johnny and let out a wild scream of delight. Her hair was such a flaming shade of red it just had to be real. Most of the time she reminded Johnny of an excited bird—probably a cross between a cuckoo and a sparrow. Miss Tillingham was just fifty, she always insisted, and had been the same age for the past ten years.

"Johnny, my lamb!" She rushed to him, flung both arms around him and managed to bang him in three or four places with the brief-case and the purse. "When Nancy phoned me last night and told me you were missing, and she'd discovered a couple of dead men, I was too excited for words."

Johnny kissed her politely on the left cheek. After all she was a second cousin on her mother's side, and his had always been an affectionate family.

"The moment I talked to Nancy I knew you both needed me." Mazie hit him with the bag three more times as she stepped back. "So I managed to get a chair on a train that left Baltimore at nine-thirty-eight this morning, and here I am. Do show me the bodies!"

"The police took them away," said Johnny. "All of which is a long story I'll tell you later, Mazie." The idea of Nancy being alone at a strange hotel bothered him. "Right now I'm worried."

"Of course," said Mazie. "It's only natural you should be, after all you haven't had as much experience with murder as I've had."

The three bellboys put down the luggage they carried and lined up in a row. They stood at attention, listening with interest to everything Mazie said. She had a clear voice, and Johnny wasn't sure she could be heard for at least two miles when the wind was right.

"Remember the way I killed off Harper Gargoyle with the poisoned dart?" Mazie asked. "I think that was one of my cleverest murders. It was no wonder Detective-Sergeant Murphy was baffled. He was such a dear. I felt awful when I finally had to shoot him."

Johnny looked at her dazedly, then realized she was talking about the characters in one of the detective novels she'd written. The three bellboys stared at Mazie with the expressions of a trio trying to conceal a nice blend of fascination and horror. Carson left the desk and casually edged nearer.

"But where is Nancy?" Mazie asked.

"She checked out and went to another hotel; I don't know why."

"Maybe you just *think* she went to another hotel," said Mazie. "Perhaps she's been spirited away before your very eyes. That's what happened to Patty Parrotree, remember?"

"No," said Johnny.

"Of course you do," said Mazie impatiently. "Why you helped me plan the whole thing. Everyone thought she'd merely gone away on a visit, when actually I'd had her kidnapped and taken to the old abandoned summer theater by Cuthering Warren and Sandwell Foster."

"These people you're talking about are all characters from your books, of course," Johnny said clearly and loudly.

"Naturally," said Mazie.

The bellboys all looked disappointed, and for the first time Johnny noticed Eddie Doyle was one of them.

"Hello, Eddie," Johnny said.

"Hi, Mr. Morton," said Doyle. "Did

they tell you at the desk Mrs. Morton checked out about an hour ago?"

"Yes, thanks, Eddie," said Johnny. "Did she say why she left in such a hurry?"

"No, sir," said Doyle.

"Come on, Mazie," said Johnny. He didn't like the way Carson was standing a short distance away watching them. "We're going to the Eastside Hotel and find Nancy."

"WELL, ALL right," Mazie said reluctantly. "Personally I'd prefer to reside at the scene of the crime. That's what I made Martha Rockinghorse do in 'Assassins In the Cellar.' Remember?"

"Vividly," said Johnny who couldn't remember a thing about it and enjoyed the lapse of memory. He turned to Doyle. "All right, Eddie; you and the rest of the boys take the luggage out and get us a cab. We're going to the Eastside Hotel."

"Reluctantly, as far as I'm concerned," said Mazie. "I feel I may be needed here."

"If you are they'll send for you," Johnny said hastily. "Let's get moving, Eddie."

"Okay, Mr. Morton," Doyle said sadly, picking up the bag that was as large as a small steamer trunk. "But we'll miss you around here; at least I will. The Park Towers will never seem the same to me without you and the bear."

"Try to be brave about it, Eddie." said Johnny. "Maybe Mr. Bruin and I will drop in and see you again sometime."

"Gee, that'll be swell!" Doyle looked at the other bellboys. "Come on, fellers, let's go."

Johnny and Mazie followed the bellboys and the luggage out into the street. After everything had been placed in a cab and Mazie settled on the back seat, Johnny tipped the two other bellboys each a dollar, then drew Doyle aside and slipped him a five-dollar bill.

"Try doing a little detective work around the hotel, Eddie," Johnny said. "I'm still a suspect, so if you learn anything you think might be connected with the murders phone me at my office. The firm name is Lanceford, Farrell and Morton and the number is in the phone book. If you can't reach me there, try the Eastside Hotel, I'll make it worth your while."

"Thanks, Mr. Morton," said Doyle. "I'll sure do that."

Johnny settled himself on the seat beside Mazie as the cab rolled away. "Want me to tell you the whole story?"

"Not now," said Mazie, with a quick glance at the taxi driver's back. "Later. Little pitchers have big ears."

"Right," said Johnny.

"I haven't been to New York in ages," said Mazie, staring out of the windows on her side of the cab. "I see they're still rebuilding the town."

"They always are," said Johnny. "To use an old gag, it will be a nice place if they ever get it finished."

They lapsed into silence and finally the taxi reached the Eastside Hotel, which strangely enough was over on the East Side, in the Sixties. It proved a smart and comfortable-looking place and a trio of bellboys took Mazie's luggage in to the desk. Johnny found that Mrs. John W. Morton had registered for herself and husband, and had room 528. Mazie asked for a room on the fifth floor near Mr. and Mrs. Morton and got it. They took the elevator up to the fifth floor. With three bellboys and Mazie's luggage the car seemed rather crowded to Johnny.

"You get settled, Mazie," Johnny said, as a bellboy unlocked 532. "I'll go find Nancy and make sure she's all right."

"See you later," Mazie said. She was too busy issuing orders to the bellboys to pay much attention as Johnny left.

HE HURRIED to the closed door of 528, knocked and gave his name and Nancy let him in. He shut the door, then took her in his arms and kissed her.

"I've been worried," he said as he finally released her. "I followed Adam Dabney to Grand Central. He knew I was trailing him and asked what I wanted, so I told him about the murders. He and his wife have the room across from eleven-fifteen at the Park Towers and he admitted they went down to the grill around twelve last night."

"Then the Dabneys must be the couple I saw," said Nancy.

"I thought so, too," said Johnny, "until Dabney told me his wife is a blonde."

"And the woman I saw had dark hair," said Nancy. "Then what happened?"

"Dabney took a train to Rye to see about buying a house out there. When I returned to the Park Towers I couldn't find you in the lobby or dining room so I went up to eleven-fifty-two."

"I left word with the desk clerk to tell you I'd gone to this hotel," said Nancy. "Didn't he do it?"

"I didn't have sense enough to ask," said Johnny. "But I'll come to that later."

"All right." Nancy seated herself in a chair. "I can wait. I'm not going anywhere—I hope." She smiled. "Go on, honey."

"There was a woman in eleven-fifty-two named Elaine Newell," said Johnny. "She told me she'd just moved in there, and heard the couple who had the room had checked out. I'd never heard of her before."

"Neither have I," said Nancy. "I've a feeling I can bravely do without her everlasting friendship." The blue eyes were serious as they stared at Johnny. "What's she like besides wearing that awful violet perfume that stinks to high heaven?"

"How'd you know about the perfume?" Johnny asked, finding a chair and sinking down in amazement.

"Your coat fairly reeks of the stuff," said Nancy. "That gal doesn't wear perfume; she wallows in it. I suspect she discovered you were a big, good-look hunk of stuff and made a pass at you."

"She did." Johnny grinned. "There I was, my beautiful wife missing, and my honor at stake. Suddenly I remembered Barry Lanceford had noticed the faint odor of violet perfume in eleven-fifteen. I asked Elaine Newell what she was doing in the murder room. She decided I was a cop and told me to get out of there, which I did."

"Good boy!" Nancy laughed. "Then what happened?"

"I went down to the hotel desk, learned from Carson and the hotel clerk you'd gone to this hotel, and then Mazie arrived in all her glory."

"Goody, goody," said Nancy; "I hope she's residing at the Park Towers in said glory."

"But she isn't; she has a room down the hall from us here at this hotel."

"How nice," said Nancy sadly. "Mazie is a sweet old gal in a violent sort of way, but it was never part of my girlish dreams to have her along with me on my honeymoon."

"I never dreamed of it either," said Johnny. "And I've had a few good nightmares in my time. But let's face Mazie when she comes to us, which could be at any moment. Why'd you leave the Park Towers in such a hurry?"

"Because I was scared," said Nancy. "After you left to go chasing after Adam Dabney I remained in the dining room to have a second cup of coffee. While I was sitting there who should come in but our old and completely mistrusted friend Stanton King."

"Then he recovered," said Johnny.

"Evidently, but I haven't." Nancy rose and pulled an envelope out of her purse on the bureau. "King started to

walk by my table without speaking, then stooped down, apparently picked this up off the floor and handed it to me."

She gave Johnny the envelope. "Read what's inside."

Johnny drew out the single sheet of white paper. On it was neatly typed:

Neither of you have long to live.

That was all it said. Johnny stared at the words, then glanced at Nancy and frowned.

"What did Stanton King do after he gave you this?" Johnny asked.

"Walked out of the dining room and disappeared," said Nancy. "I had a feeling it would make you unhappy to come back and find me murdered so I checked out in a hurry and came to this hotel."

"Good idea," said Johnny, again glancing at the warning. "But I wonder if we're safe even here?"

Nancy shuddered and looked at him blankly.

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SLOWLY Johnny folded the warning note and placed it back in the envelope then thrust it into his coat pocket. That he was a murder suspect was bad enough without the possibility of himself and Nancy being the next victims of the killer.

"You think King may have typed that warning?" Nancy asked.

"I don't know." Johnny said. "If he did, then he's made two big mistakes. The police can trace the typewriter on which the note was wrtten, if they find the machine. Besides, I doubt that Captain Drake will think I wrote that note, and it might make me less of a suspect. At least I hope so."

He rose as they heard a knock on the door. Nancy glanced at him anxiously.

"Who is it?" Johnny called without unlocking the door.

"Mazie. May I come in?"

With a feeling of relief Johnny opened the door. Mazie stepped into the room. Nancy voiced the usual polite greetings and kissed her on the cheek. Johnny closed and locked the door.

"Now tell me all about it," Mazie said, seating herself in a comfortable chair. "I don't even know who was murdered yet."

"This will be a shock to you, Mazie," said Johnny. "The murder victims were Jeffery Marshall and Lester Booth."

"Merciful butterflies!" exclaimed Mazie in horror. "Not Jeff and Lester. Why they were at my house in Baltimore just a few days ago." She looked at Nancy and shook her head sadly. "Your own uncle, and now he's dead."

"I know," said Nancy. "Sometimes the very thought of it makes me sick way deep inside. It—it doesn't seem possible."

"Such things *do* happen," Mazie said soothingly. She looked at Johnny who stood near the door. "Tell me the whole thing."

Johnny told Mazie everything that had happened since he awakened in room 1115 and found he'd lost his memory for the time being. When he had finished Nancy related her part of the story in full detail.

"It's perfectly obvious," Mazie said firmly. "That bellboy, Eddie Doyle, is the murderer, of course. His story of the bear phoning down for scotch and soda is ridiculous—bears don't drink. At least I've never heard of any that did."

The room phone rang and Nancy answered it.

"Hello?" she said. "Oh, Captain Drake calling; yes, ask him to come right up, please."

She hung up and looked at Johnny, who stared at her bleakly.

"Drake has changed his mind,"

Johnny said. "He's decided I'm guilty and is going to lock me up."

"I doubt it," said Mazie. "When the police intend to make an arrest they don't usually announce their arrival first."

In a few minutes Captain Drake arrived; as usual, Thomas N. Ward was with him, notebook sticking out of the stout police stenographer's left coat pocket.

"This is my cousin, Miss Mazie Tillingham," Johnny said as the two men entered and he closed the door. "Captain Drake and Mr. Ward of Homicide."

"Charmed, Captain," said Mazie, smiling at Drake. "You remind me so much of Inspector Fluffyfeathers that I had Basil nearly kill with a poisoned dart from a blow-gun."

Ward automatically took out his notebook and pencil. The stout man gazed at Mazie with the expression of an unhappy hippopotamus, and failed to make a note of it.

"Miss Tillingham writes detective novels," said Johnny, out of kindness and a mild liking for Thomas N. Ward. "She loves to compare people with her characters."

"Of course—Mazie Tillingham." Drake looked at Mazie with interest. "I thought the name seemed famliar. Didn't you write 'Assassins In The Cellar'?"

"I did," said Mazie delightedly; "don't tell me you read the book Captain?"

"I certainly did," said Drake. "And enjoyed it a lot. I thought it was very good. I wasn't able to spot the murderer until the climax."

"What became of Mr. Bruin?" Johnny asked Drake. "I rather liked that bear."

"He's all right," said Drake. "We had the ASPCA come and take him away and keep him until we found the owner. We did find the owner an hour or so ago. He reported to the police that his trained bear was missing. Man named Tony Gallo, who has an act with the bear's he's been doing. They were playing in a night club in a building next to the Park Towers last night when the bear suddenly disappeared." The captain smiled. "I think Mr Bruin got tired of his usual routine and wandered into the hotel."

"How he got to the eleventh floor is a mystery we haven't solved yet," said Ward.

"THIS CERTAINLY is a fascinating case," said Mazie. "The bear, the dead men in the closet, and the hotel manager threatening to kill Johnny and Nancy unless they give him Jeffery Marshall's collection of unset diamonds?"

"What?" demanded Drake in surprise "I hadn't heard about that, or the diamonds either." He looked at Johnny. "Better tell me about it, Morton."

"All right, Captain," said Johnny. "I will."

He quickly told everything that had happened from the time Drake and Ward left him in the room at the Park Towers with Farrell and Lanceford until he brought Mazie to this hotel and found Nancy here. Ward took it all down in shorthand. Then Nancy told why she had checked out of the other hotel and Johnny handed the warning note over to Drake.

"Very interesting," said Drake. "I want to question Stanton King and the house detective at the Park Towers. Also Adam Dabney and Elaine Newell. The diamonds and the warning note give us a couple of new angles." The captain drew what looked like a leather jewel case from his pocket. "We found this among Jeffery Marshall's possessions. It was empty, save from some papers I'll show you in a minute. I realize now that it might have contained the diamonds."

"It does look like the case in which Uncle Jeff always carried the dia-

monds," said Nancy. "What were the papers in it, Captain?"

"Here's the first one," said Drake, unfolding a paper. "It is written in lead pencil and reads: *'Paid five thousand to C, forty-five thousand demanded by August fourteenth. Sheer blackmail.'* " The captain looked at Nancy. "Would you recognize your uncle's handwriting if you saw it, Mrs Morton?"

"I think so." Nancy stared at the writing on the paper as Drake held it out to her "That does look like Uncle Jeff's writing."

"Of course it is," said Mazie as she also looked at it. "I'd know Jeff Marshall's writing anywhere; Lord knows I've seen enough of it. We thought we were in love when we were younger and he used to write me every day. Blackmail, eh? I'm not surprised. Jeff was always getting in trouble over some woman; that's why I never trusted him enough to marry him."

Drake produced a folded sheet of blue and feminine-looking notepaper. He unfolded it and read what had been written on it with a pen.

"'Daddy precious,' " Drake read dryly. *" 'Last night with you was so wonderful. I'm living every moment of it over in my dreams. I'm counting the hours and minutes until Thursday night when we'll be together again. I think the star sapphire ring is the nicest of all the gifts you've given me. Your adoring, Cuddles.'* "

"The old goat!" said Mazie. "If you'll pardon me for speaking disrespectfully of the dead I'll bet that Cuddles woman murdered Jeff Marshall because she couldn't stand him any longer."

"He apparently paid someone with the initial 'C' five thousand dollars, and promised to pay forty-five thousand more," Johnny said. The 'C' could stand for 'Cuddles'. Of course it's just a nickname."

"Naturally," said Nancy. "There are doubtlessly lots of nice girls with the nickname of 'Cuddles', but I doubt the gal who wrote that letter is one of of them." She looked at Drake. "May I see that letter, Captain?"

"Of course, Mrs Morton."

DRAKE HANDED Nancy the letter. She studied the handwriting, then held the blue note-paper close to her nose and sniffed. "Violet perfume, well, well!" Nancy looked at Johnny. "What was the name of the woman you found in our former room at the Park Towers, darling?"

"Elaine Newell," Johnny said; "you mean you think she might be Cuddles?"

"I do," said Nancy firmly. "The perfume is exactly the same as that you had all over you after you left Elaine, the silly maid."

"That might be it," said Mazie. "Maybe Jeff found out she was blackmailing him, threatened to turn her over to the police, and she killed him to keep him quiet."

"I like that, Miss Tillingham," Drake said. "Like it enough to consider it a possibility in this case; but that doesn't explain why Lester Booth was murdered."

"He also had been known to talk too much," said Mazie.

"I see." Drake put the note, the letter and the jewel case back in his pocket and rose to his feet. "Come on, Tom. We're going to interview a few people at the Park Towers."

The captain and Ward departed. Johnny found himself alone with Nancy and Mazie.

"It's almost one o'clock and I'm hungry," said Mazie, glancing at her wrist-watch. "How about lunch?"

"Suits me," said Johnny. "Where will we eat?"

"Let's try the dining room here," said Nancy.

"Fine."

When they had nearly finished their

meal in the Eastside Hotel dining room, a bellboy came to the table. "Mr. John W. Morton?"

"That's right," said Johnny. "What is it?"

"There's a phone call for you, sir," said the bellboy. "Mr. Farrell calling. He asked to have you paged when your room didn't answer. The desk clerk remembered he'd seen you go into the dining room and pointed you out. Will you take the call, sir? Mr. Farrell said it was important."

"All right," said Johnny, rising from the table. "I'll take it." He smiled at Nancy and Mazie. "Be back in a few moments."

Johnny followed the bellboy to a phone booth in the lobby reserved for hotel guests. He tipped the boy and entered the booth. The hotel operator connected him with Mark Farrell.

"Hello, Mark. What's wrong?"

"I've got to see you alone as soon as possible," said the little redhead. I'm worried about Barry. He's been acting strangely ever since a couple of days after you left for Baltimore on your vacation. I think he's mixed up with some dame."

"That's pretty much his business, isn't it? Barry's old enough to take care of his own affairs."

"Maybe, though I never considered him overly bright about women. I've a feeling he's in trouble of some sort. It's too long a story to go into over the phone. What are you doing now, Johnny?"

"I was eating lunch with Nancy and my cousin Mazie Tillingham, who's just arrived from Baltimore."

"Couldn't you slip away and meet me somewhere so we could talk it over?"

"Why, I guess so, Mark. Sure, I'll do that. What time shall I meet you and where?"

"How about that little bar two blocks east of the office? You know the place. We've been there often."

"All right," said Johnny. "See you there as soon as I can make it."

"Swell!" said Farrell.

JOHNNY started back to the dining room and then hesitated as a smartly-dressed darkhaired woman nodded to him. He found it was Elaine Newell. She came closer. "We could be friends, Mr. Morton," she said. "If you get in touch with me later at the Park Towers, I might have some information you'd like to have."

"Such as what?"

"From what I've heard around the Park Towers you're mixed up in those murders pretty deep. There's talk of you being the main suspect." She frowned. "Sometimes I get the damnedest impulses, such as trying to do you a good deed, Johnny Morton."

"You amaze me," said Johnny dryly. "What's the information?"

"I haven't time to go into that now," said Elaine. "I'm meeting friends here for lunch. Maybe you can find a way to get in touch with me later alone. You can reach me at the Park Towers if you should phone."

"I'll remember that," said Johnny, as he turned away. "Thanks, Miss Newell."

He went back to the dining room to find Nancy and Mazie finishing their coffee. He decided to say nothing about having just met Elaine Newell as he seated himself at the table. The hotel lobby could not be seen from the dining room.

"Mark wants to see me about a legal matter," he said. "It's rather important—there are some angles to the case only I know about" Johnny smiled at Nancy. "That's what happens when you marry an attorney. I told Mark I'd meet him as soon as possible. Do you mind?"

"Not in the least," said Nancy. "Mazie and I decided we'd like to do a little shopping this afternoon. When a couple of Baltimore girls get to New

York, they love to go through the stores."

"We were wondering what to do with you if we went shopping, Johnny," Mazie said. "If there's one thing I can't stand it's having a man trailing around at a time like that. They always look resigned, smug, or superior —sometimes all three."

"So you run along and see Mark," said Nancy. "Suppose we try to be back here by five, and you make your plans accordingly, darling?"

"Fine," said Johnny as he paid the luncheon check. He looked at Nancy adoringly. "But I'll miss you, honey."

"And I'll miss you," Nancy said.

"Ikky goo!" said Mazie.

"She's just jealous because she's never been in love." Nancy said.

"Never been in love!" exclaimed Mazie. "If you only knew!"

JOHNNY left Nancy and Mazie in the hotel lobby, after kissing them both goodbye, then headed for the bar where he had agreed to meet Mark Farrell. He found the little redhead sitting alone at one end of the bar staring somberly at a scotch highball that looked as if it hadn't been tasted.

"Hi, Johnny," said Farrell, as Johnny seated himself on the next stool. "I'm still a reformed character as of from the time I passed out in eleven-fifteen this morning. I sneak up on these things like they were going to bite me, take a sip and shudder."

"Why shudder?" Johnny asked.

"Because they taste so good I'd like to swallow them in a few gulps."

The bartender came down and Johnny ordered scotch and water. The bartender served it and went back to the other end of the bar where there were more customers.

"Let me ask you a question first?" Farrell said "Just how well do you know Barry Lanceford? Outside of the office, I mean."

"Why, I never thought much about that. He's a quiet sort of man."

"I'll tell you just what we both know about him," said Farrell. "Six years ago Barry took us in with him to handle some of his law business and finally made us both partners in the firm. We know he's a widower with no children, and his wife died ten years ago."

"Right, so far," said Johnny, as Farrell paused; "go on."

"Barry has a four room bachelor apartment at Eighty-first Street and Riverside Drive. We've been there a few times, but not very often, during the years we've known him. He's a damn clever lawyer; we've worked with him in Court enough to be sure of that. But there's one thing about him that bothers me, Johnny."

"What is it?"

"He seems such a cold fish at heart. We're his partners but damned if I can tell you whether Barry Lanceford is a good friend of ours deep down underneath or not. It worries me, Johnny."

"I see what you mean." Johnny nodded.

It was strange that now as he talked to the wiry little redhead he'd always considered his closest friend he should be remembering the warning note—that death-threat—and it made him wary. Johnny realized that the murders had distorted his impressions of everyone. He saw them all through the wavy glass of suspicion.

Was Mark deliberately trying to make him suspect Barry? Was all this talk about Lanceford being a man they did not know very well, in spite of their years of personal contact, a clever trick upon Farrell's part? Johnny found himself wondering.

"As I told you over the phone, Barry has been acting strangely ever since you went away on your vacation," Farrell said. "He hasn't been at the office as much as usual I've had to do some of his work."

Johnny took another long sip of his

drink. He felt Mark Farrell watching him as he spoke, making sure of the reaction to his words. It gave Johnny a strange, lonely sensation. Almost as if someone he had known well and liked a lot had died, yet was still there talking.

Farrell's words fade away into a blank silence. He took a long swallow of his drink. He sat hunched over a little on the stool, his gray-green eyes fixed on his partner's face.

Johnny knew Farrell was waiting for him to speak, to see how much impression he had made so far. Johnny hated the thought of it, and yet anything was better than the silence.

"Go on," Johnny said, impatience sweeping over him. He wanted to get the conversation finished and get out of this place "What's the rest of it?"

FARRELL blinked and turned his gaze away, staring at himself in the mirror behind the bar. Johnny's words meant nothing, and Farrell was disappointed, though he was trying not to make it obvious.

"Barry acts like he's in trouble," Farrell said. "I don't know what it's all about. Maybe money—maybe a woman; he's not saying."

"Why a woman?" Johnny asked.

"You know how Barry always doodles on a piece of paper when he phones or is thinking of something?" Farrell swung around, watching Johnny again. "I found scraps of paper with that sort of stuff scrawled on it on his desk."

"Did you?" Johnny said, trying to keep the scorn for such petty spying out of his voice. "So what?"

"He'd written the initials *'E. N.'* over and over," Farrell said. "And in another place one hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

"I see." Johnny finished off his drink and put down the empty glass. The liquor seemed like angry fire burning within him. "Go on, Mark; I know what you've been leading up to now. Tell me you suspect Barry Lanceford is the murderer, and let's get it over with!"

"What if I do think that," Farrell was suddenly trying to work himself into a race, and it was too obviously forced to be convincing. "I've got a right to my own opinion, haven't I?"

"You have," said Johnny, feeling strangely tired. "But don't try to sell it to me, Mark; I'm not having any." He slid down off the stool and tossed a dollar bill onto the bar to pay for his drink and tip the bartender. "You forget Barry's also my partner and I trust him."

"You fool!" Mark Farrell said as Johnny turned to walk out of the bar. "Barry has handled all of Jeffery Marshall's business and legal affairs for the past two years, though I didn't learn it until recently. What do you think of that?"

"That you could be lying," said Johnny and kept right on walking out of the place without looking back.

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THE AFTERNOON sunlight was bright and warm as Johnny Morton left the little bar on 45th Street and walked west toward Fifth Avenue. He was still angry, and it was an accumulative sort of rage which his talk with Mark Farrell had only served to increase.

He couldn't forget someone had obviously tried to frame him for the murders of Jeffery Marshall and Lester Booth. He realized that if Captain Robert Drake had not been a man of more than unusual intelligence, Johnny Morton would be in jail by now, held on a charge of suspicion of murder.

It was only when he was with Nancy that Johnny was able to dismiss the murders from his mind to a certain extent, though they were never completely blotted out. The shadows were always hanging over him.

Mental pictures lingered in his mind. The ghastly vision of the still figures of Marshall and Booth slumped down on the floor of the closet in the hotel room seemed etched on his brain. He tried to think of other details. Where were Jeffery Marshall's clothes and personal belongings? They apparently hadn't been in room 1115, yet Marshall had been wearing shirt, trouser and smoking jacket.

"Um," Johnny said aloud. "Carson said Marshall had checked out suddenly on the night of the murder. Yet Marshall didn't look as if he'd had the slightest intention of leaving the hotel. Now why did Carson lie about that?"

He kept remembering his talk with Mark Farrell. What the little red-head had said about Barry doodling and the initials *'E. N.' 'E. N.'*—why those were Elaine Newell's initials. Was Lanceford mixed up with her in some way?

If he was, then Johnny could understand why Barry had been acting strangely, if he actually had been. Johnny only had Farrell's word for that. Barry had seemed about the same as usual during the time Johnny had been with him this morning.

Still, Elaine was the type of woman who might drive a man like Barry wild; she obviously used sex to get what she wanted as casually as an ordinary person used a knife and fork to eat their dinner. You never could tell about those quiet and apparently-cold individuals like Lanceford—sometimes they had warm fires burning within them.

After he wandered around for over an hour, Johnny reached a decision. He entered the lobby of a big office building where he knew there were public phone booths. He looked up the number of the Park Towers Hotel in the Manhattan Directory, and stepped into a booth and dialed the number after dropping a dime in the coin box.

"Miss Elaine Newell, please," he told the hotel operator.

"Yes, sir," said the operator. "I'll see if Miss Newell is in. Hold the wire."

Johnny noticed she didn't ask his name. Probably Elaine had left orders that if a man called she would answer.

"Hello?" said Elaine's voice over the wire.

"This is Johnny Morton," Johnny said. "I've been thinking about what you told me earlier today."

"Oh," said Elaine. "That I was a fool to try and do you a favor?"

"That and the rest of it," Johnny said. "Maybe we'd better talk it over alone."

"You mean your wife will let you out of her sight?" asked Elaine. "You amaze me."

"She doesn't know anything about it," Johnny said. "She's gone shopping with my cousin and won't be back until five. Where and when can I see you?"

"Why not here at my room in the hotel?" demanded Elaine. "You remember the number—eleven-fifty-two."

"Yes, I remember."

"Good," said Elaine. "How soon can you get here?"

"Maybe twenty minutes; half hour at the most."

"All right," said Elaine. "But don't bring anyone with you. You know what I mean. I had enough of that after Drake got through talking to me a little while ago. All that Cuddles stuff!"

"I'll come alone," Johnny said; "be there soon as I can make it."

"Then hurry." Elaine's voice sounded seductive even over the phone. "Just come straight up to my room."

"Okay," said Johnny as he hung up.

He felt guilty as he stepped out of the booth. Nancy didn't know a thing about his having talked to Elaine Newell again, and now he was going to see her in her hotel room. He'd even assured her he wouldn't bring anyone with him.

AS JOHNNY got into a taxi and gave the Park Towers as his destination, he remembered he had one friend at the hotel. That was Eddie Doyle, the thin, sandy-haired bellboy. Doyle had promised to do some amateur detective work when Johnny talked to him this morning, but evidently Eddie had learned nothing of interest as yet.

The taxi drew up in front of the Park Towers. Johnny paid the driver and got out. He strolled into the hotel lobby. To his relief a clerk he did not know was behind the desk, and there was no sign of the house detective.

Eddie Doyle was sitting on the bench with two other bellboys. He got swiftly to his feet as he spied Johnny, and hurried to him "Gee, it's nice to see you again, Mr. Morton," Doyle said with a smile. "How are Mrs. Morton and Mr. Bruin?"

"Mrs. Morton is fine," Johnny said. "The bear's all right, I guess. He's back with his owner, a man named Gallo. They've an act they do in night clubs."

"I checked with the operator about Mr. Bruin phoning down for the scotch," Doyle said. "That call didn't come from eleven-fifteen. It came from eleven-seventeen, which was vacant this morning."

"Then anyone could have made the call," said Johnny.

"Sure—if they had a pass-key," said Doyle. "The unoccupied rooms are always kept locked; it's a rule of the hotel. The police checked with the operator, too. If you ask me, Captain Drake is a smart cookie—he doesn't miss a thing."

"So I've found out," Johnny said dryly. A thought struck him. "Do you happen to know if Mr. Marshall and Mr. Booth checked out last night before they were murdered? I mean that Marshall gave up his room but didn't leave the hotel."

"Not as far as I know," said Doyle. "Mr. Booth had room eleven-sixty-seven. When the police checked, they found that all of Mr. Marshall's clothes had been packed up and placed in Mr. Booth's room. That's why there was nothing in room eleven-fifteen but you and the bear and the two bodies."

"What do you know about Mr. and Mrs. Adam Dabney?" Johnny asked.

"They're nice people," said Doyle. Retired vaudeville folks—he used to have a knife throwing act and she was his assistant. He got back from Rye a little while ago. I believe the police questioned them."

"Know anything about Miss Elaine Newell?" Johnny asked.

"Oh, her!" There was a note of contempt in the bellboy's voice. "Somebody has been keeping that dame, and I figure she's playing him for a sucker. Never been able to be sure who pays the rent, though; that babe is smart."

"So I gather," said Johnny. "I suspect she knows something about the murders. That's why I'm here now, to talk to her about it."

"I see." Doyle's tone grew cold, and Johnny didn't like the bellboy's expression. "Well, I'll be seeing you, Mr. Morton."

Doyle walked away before Johnny could say anything further. There was almost contempt in the abrupt departure. It was obvious that Doyle didn't approve of a man with a pretty wife like Nancy Morton having anything to do with a woman of Elaine Newell's type.

With a shrug Johnny headed for the elevators, found a car waiitng and got in with two or three other passengers. "Eleven, please," he told the operator as the car started up.

He got out at the eleventh floor alone and walked along the hall until he reached the door of 1152. It stood open just a crack.

"Elaine?" he called.

There was no answer. Johnny felt a strange uneasiness sweeping over him. There was something wrong about the silence of the room. He pushed the door open wider and stood there staring in.

Elaine was lying on the big double bed, fully dressed. Her dark hair seemed blue against the white of the pillow case. Her face was ghastly from the necktie with the nude woman on it drawn tight around her throat.

JOHNNY wanted to run wildly down the hall shouting at the top of his lungs from the very horror of it, but he fought for control of his nerves. He forced himself to step into the room. Perhaps Elaine was still breathing and if he released that necktie around her throat she might live. He went to the bed. Even as he touched the necktie he realized it was too late; Elaine Newell was dead.

"Good God!" said a voice from the door. "Johnny! You couldn't do this to me!"

Johnny dropped the end of the necktie and turned. Barry Lanceford stepped into the room. His eyes were fixed on the still figure on the bed. He came closer, lifted Elaine's left wrist and felt for the pulse with almost the professional air of a doctor. Then he slowly lowered her arm. Lanceford seemed to have aged ten years as he swung around and faced Johnny. "Damn you," he said in a tired voice. "Why did you have to kill her, Johnny?"

"I didn't," Johnny said.

"What's the use of lying about it." Lanceford dropped into a chair. "Didn't I see you standing there by the bed still holding the necktie you strangled her with in your hand."

"I found her like that," Johnny said; "I thought she might still be alive, and was going to unfasten the tie."

"Please, I don't want to hear about it," said Lanceford. "All I can think now is she's gone. I—I've lost her forever. For the past weeks and months I've tried to tell myself I was a fool. That she was nothing but a cheap, two-timing little hussy who'd do anything for money, but it didn't matter. She was in my blood; I was mad about her and now—now she's gone."

"I'm sorry, Barry," Johnny said gently.

"Sorry?" Lanceford frowned. "What a strange thing to say about the woman you've just killed. This morning there in the room, you were found with the bodies of Marshall and Booth and I told Captain Drake about the perfume I knew then."

"Knew what?" Johnny asked.

"That it was Elaine's perfume," Lanceford said. "I bought it for her and she always used too much of it, just as she gave too much of herself to anyone she liked."

Lanceford got slowly to his feet. A tall man with a hawk-like face grown gaunt and old. His shoulders slumped.

Johnny glanced at the figure on the bed, then turned his gaze away. The room suddenly seemed small and stuffy, and the bleakness of death lingered in it now.

"I knew then you hadn't been as drunk as we thought when we put you in that room with the bear," Lanceford said. "Knew Elaine had been with you there. You were smart, Johnny, pretending you'd lost your memory. It worked out fine."

"What do you mean?" Johnny asked, suddenly afraid of his partner, for Bar-

ry evidently believed every word he was saying. "I don't understand."

"Yes, you do, Johnny. What's the use of pretending now? You killed Jeffery Marshall and Lester Booth—"

"Wrong!" Johnny interrupted impatiently. "I didn't do any such thing." His voice rose in sudden anger. "What are you trying to do, Barry? Frame me for all three murders?"

"You did it!" Lanceford's voice was harsh. "You had to kill Jeff Marshall before he changed his will and cut your new wife off without a cent, and I didn't know Elaine was working with you."

"You're wrong, Barry," Johnny said in a calmer tone, but there was desperation in his voice. He had remembered that Barry Lanceford was a clever attorney who knew every possible way to sway a jury and impress the law. "So terribly wrong. You must believe I had nothing to do with any of the murders."

LANCEFORD glanced at the dead woman on the bed. His expression was hard and bitter. "There's only one thing I believe now. And that's Elaine is dead and you killed her, Johnny. Killed her to keep her from talking, and I'll hate you for it until the day I die."

"That's what I've been waiting to hear again," Dan Carson said as he appeared in the still open doorway. "I've been listening out in the hall."

He stood there, a big man, his face strangely white and grim.

"You always seem to be around when things happen, Carson," said Johnny quietly.

"Yeah." Carson's voice was thick with hate as he glared at Johnny. "And I wish I'd got here before you killed my wife!"

Barry Lanceford stared at Carson as though seeing him for the first time. The house detective stepped into the room, careful not to turn his back on the other two men as he shoved the door closed with his heel. He was wearing a different suit, shirt and tie.

"You mean Elaine Newell was your wife?" Johnny asked. "Is that true, Carson?"

"It is," Carson said. "And I've got our marriage certificate to prove it. We were married ten years ago when Elaine was still in Burlesque; we kept it a secret because she wanted it that way."

"I didn't know." Lanceford walked over to the bed. He pulled up a sheet so it completely covered the still figure lying there. He turned up and looked at Carson. "Her being married to you makes the whole thing more sordid and cheap than I ever thought it could be."

"There were times when I made a big stew about the guys she ran around with," Carson said; "but I got over it. Somebody had to pay for her clothes and the room rent and all. Why should I kick when I wasn't forking over the dough. She didn't make any fuss about about me playing around."

"I wanted to impress her," Lanceford said. "My being an attorney didn't seem quite enough. She got a kick out of knowing important people. I let her think I was also a millionaire —and it cost me every cent I owned and more."

"You could have killed her, Carson," Johnny said.

"Sez you," snapped Carson. "You're not pinning it on me; it won't work. When I tell my story to the police you'll be all finished, Morton."

"Suppose you tell your story to the police now, Carson," said Captain Drake as he pushed the door open and stepped into the room. Thomas N. Ward followed close behind the captain, and the stout police stenographer had a notebook and pencil in his hands. "We're anxious to hear it."

BEHIND them appeared Eddie Doyle, and the bellboy nodded to Johnny. "I got worried after you went

up here, Mr. Morton," Doyle said. "So I came up to see if everything was all right. When I heard you all talking about Miss Newell being murdered I phoned Captain Drake and he sure got here fast."

Drake went to the bed, drew back the sheet and stared at the dead woman. "Morton killed her," Carson said. "Strangled her to death because he was afraid she'd talk too much."

"You've been trying hard to frame Morton ever since this morning, haven't you, Carson?" Drake swung around and faced the house detective. "Personally, I thought you overdid it at times."

"What do you mean?" Carson demanded; "I don't get it."

"Elaine Newell was Carson's wife," Johnny said. "Did you know that, Captain?"

"We weren't sure of it," said Drake; "but we suspected they were working together. Ward managed to get a sample of her handwriting while I was questioning her here earlier this afternoon. It was the same writing as that of the letter 'Cuddles' wrote Marshall."

"What're you guys getting at?" Carson demanded truculently. "You sound like you think *I'm* the killer."

"We do, Carson," said Drake; "we've suspected it ever since this morning."

"Yeah," said Carson. "Why me?"

"Morton was a stranger to you; there was no reason for you working so hard to frame him unless it was a cover-up," said Drake. "Suppose you and your wife were blackmailing Jeffery Marshall. Marshall and Miss Newell were having a wild party and you walked in on them, Carson."

"That happened a little over two weeks ago," said Eddie Doyle as he stood listening. "One night Mr. Marshall phoned down for drinks. I brought them up. Mr. Marshall met me at the door and took the tray. He had on a dressing gown or something. He didn't think I saw anything, but I got a peek over his shoulder. Miss Newell was lying on one of the twin beds and wearing a nightgown."

"I hate all this," Lanceford said; "can't we get it over with, Captain?"

"Sorry, Lanceford," Drake said. "These things have to be done." He looked at the bellboy. "Anything more, Doyle?"

"Yes, sir," said Doyle. "I saw Mr. Carson open the door of room eleven-fifteen with his pass key a little later. He stepped in and closed the door after him. I didn't bother listening at the door, but half an hour later I got a call from another guest on the eleventh. As I went along the hall with the cigarets the guy wanted, I saw Carson and Miss Newell come out of eleven-fifteen. She was fully dressed and looked like she'd been crying."

"That was when you got five thousand out of Marshall, and his promise to give you forty-five thousand more by last night, wasn't it, Carson?" Drake demanded.

"Rot!" snapped Carson. "If you think I'll admit any of this stuff you're crazy."

"Then around midnight last night you and your wife went to Marshall's room, Carson," Drake said. "Marshall and Booth were there. Marshall refused to give you any more money and threatened to turn you over to the police. You went into a panic and stabbed and killed both men, and hid the bodies in the closet."

"Sorry, Captain," said Johnny, as he found he had been listening as intently as he would to some evidence given in a court case. "But I don't like it. To use one of your expressions, it's too pat."

"Meaning what, Morton?" Drake demanded impatiently.

"I'll agree that Carson and Miss Newell were blackmailing Jeff Marshall," Johnny said. "But both of them loved money too much to be fools enough to kill a man from whom they might still get forty-five thousand dollars."

"Could be," said Drake with a

frown; "maybe we'd better go over this more thoroughly."

THERE WERE footsteps and voices in the hall. Once more the Homicide Squad and all the rest who rolled with them had arrived. Doctor Harper, the assistant Medical Examiner was with the rest of the men.

"Must you have all your murders at this hotel?" he demanded, glaring at Drake. "Who is it this time, Drake?"

"A woman," Drake said. "Miss Elaine Newell. She was choked to death by a necktie drawn tight around her neck."

"How nice," said Doctor Harper, going to the bed and drawing back the sheet Drake had replaced after looking at the body.

"Morton killed her," Carson said, sounding strangely parrot-like. "Lanceford caught him standing by the bed with the end of the necktie still in his hand."

"That's right—I did." Lanceford looked pleadingly at Drake. "If we must do any more talking couldn't we go somewhere else? I—I can't stand it in this room much longer."

"Of course, Lanceford," Drake said quietly. He looked at the bellboy. "Any other rooms vacant on this floor, Doyle?"

"Yes, sir," said Doyle. "There's no one in eleven-fifteen now. Mr. Carson has a passkey to all the rooms."

"I do," said Carson, heading for the door. "Come on."

Drake and Ward followed the house detective and Lanceford, Doyle and Johnny trailed after them. Carson unlocked the door of 1115 and then closed it after they all had settled down in the room.

"Nothing seems to matter anymore," Lanceford said. "I guess I'll get over it in time, or do we ever really? Maybe the scars just go deeper so they're not visible to anyone else."

"You were in love with Miss Newell?" Drake asked.

"Yes," said Lanceford. "Thank you, Captain Blake. It could have been put so much more crudely. A sordid passion, or something like that."

"You guys got nerve talking about this old bird being in love with my wife," Carson said bitterly. "And trying to pin the murders on me at the same time."

"But your being the murderer all fits so nicely, Carson," said Drake. "You see, in cases like this police work consists of checking all the little details. The hotel operator who took the order this morning when Mr. Bruin phoned down for scotch and soda thought it sounded like your voice, Carson. She hinted you'd been playing around with her and she should know."

"He's always making passes at every dame we have working here," said Doyle. "He even tried it with some of the women guests."

"Tell them the rest about the phone calls, Captain," said Ward.

"Here's how you worked it, Carson," said Drake. "When Doyle came down and told you about the bear, you asked the operator to ring eleven-fifteen in fifteen minutes. She did, and all you said to her was—" the captain looked at Ward, who hastily thumbed back through his notebook. "What were the exact words, Tom?"

"Let's see," said Ward. "Here it is: 'Hello, yes, huh? All right, I'll see about it.' And then Carson hung up."

"So that's it!" said Johnny. "He phoned the first time and told me to look in the closet, then faked getting the second message after he came up to the room. Since he knew they were there, he must have planted the bodies in the closet *but that doesn't prove Carson murdered Marshall and Booth.* My wife passed this room on her way down to the grill last night. The door was open then and Nancy said she saw two figures lying on the floor and—"

"She did what?" interrupted Drake tensely.

"Saw two figures lying on the floor," repeated Johnny. "She was too startled and frightened to even tell me about it until much later."

He found he felt like a Prosecuting Attorney presenting all the facts to the jury. The shadow of sudden and perhaps mysterious death still hung over him and Nancy. He had to try and reveal the identity of the real murderer to the police if that was possible. Only by doing so, would he and Nancy be safe from further danger at the hands of the killer?

"Go on, Morton," Drake said.

"Let's suppose Carson came along this hall last night," Johnny said. "Saw the door of this room open and discovered the bodies on the floor. As house detective it was Carson's business to investigate. He did so. While he was in this room he detected the odor of violet perfume, perfume so strong it still lingered here this morning. He knew it was the perfume his wife used."

"That's right," Carson said, then lapsed into sullen silence.

"Carson knew then that Miss Newell was mixed up with the murders," Johnny went on. "He realized that when the police started investigating, they might learn he and his wife had been blackmailing Marshall. He was frightened, so much so he put the bodies in the closet on the floor. They were there when my partners left me in this room with the bear in the next bed."

"Then if Carson isn't the murderer, who is, Morton?" Drake demanded.

"I don't know," Johnny said; "I wish I did. But I understand why Dan Carson has tried so hard to frame me. He was desperate—had to have a fall guy in order to protect himself and his wife from the police."

"Blast you, Morton," Carson said, glaring at Johnny. "I didn't expect anything like this. I was so sure that you killed Elaine—but now I don't know what to think."

"That makes two of us," said Ward.

"There's one thing we must all remember," Johnny said. "Elaine Newell was strangled to death by a necktie with a nude woman painted on it. A tie Dan Carson was wearing this morning—and he's changed clothes since then." Johnny looked at Drake. "You'd better have that tie checked for fingerprints, Captain. I've a feeling you'll find Carson's fingerprints on it and mine, and also those of the killer."

-9-

JOHNNY was conscious of the others all watching him as he stopped talking. Drake's expression was thoughtful; Ward merely looked like a fat man sitting in a chair: Eddie Doyle appeared puzzled, and Barry Lanceford frowned.

"You've made me wonder, Johnny," Drake said finally. "But the police still suspect Dan Carson. We've wondered about him ever since the start of the case. It had to be someone who worked in the hotel to move all of Marshall's belongings out of his room and into the one Lester Booth occupied. If any of the guests saw Carson moving bags from one room to another they wouldn't think anything of it." The captain looked at the bellboy and smiled faintly. "We even suspected you, Doyle."

"Me?" Doyle looked startled. "But I didn't do anything."

"We know that now," said Ward; "I'm still betting on Carson."

"Aw, cut it out," Carson protested. "You haven't got any evidence against me worth a hoot and you know it. You're talking a lot of stuff that wouldn't stand up in any court. Any good lawyer could tell you that." He glanced at Johnny. "A good lawyer did just try to tell you."

"I'm afraid he's right, Captain," Lanceford said. "All you have told us so far appears merely surmise and suspicion; there's no conclusive proof of guilt."

"Maybe not." Captain Drake rose to his feet. "But all the same you're under arrest on a charge of suspicion of murder, Carson."

"All right," Carson said resignedly. "I'm not fool enough to try and resist arrest, Captain Drake."

Ward snapped his notebook shut and lumbered to his feet. Eddie Doyle quietly left the room. Drake and Ward stepped out into the corridor with their prisoner. Johnny looked at his wristwatch—it was twenty-five minutes after three.

"I still don't know if you killed her, Johnny," Lanceford said softly; "I'll never be sure about that."

He walked over to the nearest window and drew it open. He stood there, tall and gaunt as he breathed in the soft summer air. Johnny stood watching Lanceford, conscious the two of them were alone in the room now.

"But *I* didn't kill her, Barry." Johnny went over and stood beside Lanceford at the open window. The bottom of the air shaft—eleven stories below seemed so far away. Without half-realizing it he voiced his thoughts aloud—"*You* did—just as you killed those two men, Barry."

"You believe that, Johnny?" Lanceford glanced over his shoulder at the open door leading into the hall. "Really believe it?"

"Let's say I merely suspect, Barry."

Behind him Johnny heard the murmur of voices coming from the hall and knew the police were still busy out there.

"But why?" Lanceford demanded. "Why would I kill the woman I loved?"

"It's hard to be sure," Johnny said. "Perhaps you found Carson's necktie in Elaine's room. You recognized the tie, since you saw Carson wearing it this morning here in this room. Maybe Elaine told you she and Carson were married. You hated her then—and if you were the killer, you knew you could no longer trust her, and were afraid she might talk too much. So you strangled her and waited, hidden in the hall, for someone else to find the body."

"You make it sound so convincing," Lanceford said. "But why did I kill Jeff Marshall and Lester Booth?"

"There's only one reason comes to mind," Johnny said. "Mark told me you were Marshall's attorney, something Mark and I never knew before, even though we're your partners. Marshall traveled a lot and apparently didn't bother much about managing his business affairs. Perhaps you found a way to dip into his funds. You said you wanted Elaine to think you were a millionaire. When it looked as if Marshall would find out, you killed him."

"Sorry your guesses come so close, Johnny." Abruptly Lanceford grabbed Johnny and shoved him back toward the windowsill. "Damn you, Morton," he shouted loudly. "You're the killer—and trying to get me, too!"

JOHNNY struggled wildly as he found that Lanceford had succeeded in pushing him half out of the open window. He got one arm free and smashed his fist into Lanceford's chest. The blow broke Lanceford's grip on Johnny's arms and sent him staggering back. Johnny hit him again, and Lanceford went down hard. He wasn't completely knocked out, but it was quite obvious he'd had enough of the fight. He just sat against the wall at the side of the window glaring vindictively at Johnny.

"Get up and I'll hit you again," Johnny said.

"That's enough, Morton," said Drake as he appeared in the doorway with Ward and Carson behind him. "We heard every word you two said; looks like you've found the murderer, all right."

"But I didn't want it to really be

Barry," Johnny said, like a little boy finding someone he'd liked a lot wasn't worth his adoration. "I—I wasn't sure of anything I said—it was just sort of a guessing game we were playing."

"Lanceford said he was sorry your guesses came so close," Drake said as he walked into the room, "He tried to kill you by forcing you out of the window." The captain's voice was gentle. "I'm sorry, Johnny; it's tough when you learn someone you know and like is a killer."

"Murder is so often a matter of circumstances," Ward said. "The impulse of the moment." The stout police stenographer sighed as he sank into a chair and drew his notebook and pencil. "I never did believe even the worst of murderers often planned their crimes in advance."

"You're right, Ward." Lanceford scrambled to his feet. "I didn't deliberately plan to kill anyone."

"Careful, Lanceford," Drake said. "Don't forget anything you say will be used against you."

"What does it matter now?" Lanceford said. "Johnny was right when he said there would be a third set of fingerprints on that necktie drawn so terribly tight around Elaine's neck." He shuddered. "I still see her staring at me. Her—her eyes were like a beloved and faithful dog who'd been shot by its master and couldn't understand why."

"Don't—don't say that," Carson said tiredly. "The thought gives me the creeps. I—I love animals—and once Elaine and I loved each other."

"It wasn't just because I had stolen close to a hundred and fifty thousand dollars from Jeff Marshall through the power-of-attorney he gave me," said Lanceford, "that I hated him. Elaine could be cruel, ruthless. She used to taunt me about Marshall—tell me she loved him because he had more money than I could ever dream of possessing. I—"

Lanceford broke off abruptly as Adam Dabney appeared in the doorway of room 1115.

"Aren't you the Great Barry?" Dabney demanded, looking at Lanceford. "You're older now, of course, than you were in our vaudeville days, but I remember the man who had the greatest knife throwing act ever to be presented on the stage."

"That's right," Lanceford said. "I was the Great Barry in my twenties, and that you remember my act is flattering." He smiled—for the moment remembering only the past. "I did stop the show so often." He frowned. "But your face is familiar, haven't I seen you before Mr.—?"

"Adam Dabney," said Dabney. "I had a knife-throwing act, too."

"Of course, I remember now," Lanceford said. "You worked with your wife—and gave a darn good performance." He drew himself up proudly, still always the actor at heart. "I'm giving my last show now, Dabney, as a killer wanted by the police."

DABNEY gasped and looked at Johnny. Johnny nodded but there was nothing he could say.

"Barry Lanceford must have been the man with the dark-haired woman Mrs. Morton saw walking along the hall here last night," said Drake. "And I suspect the woman was Elaine Newell."

"A nice thought, Captain," said Lanceford. "But you have no proof; don't forget that Nancy found me with Mark Farrell in the grill when she came downstairs that night."

"You had time to get downstairs and join Farrell before Mrs. Morton reached the grill," said Drake. "And Miss Newell could have left you at the elevators and gone to her room instead of down to the lobby."

"She did," said Lanceford. "Last night Elaine saw me come up here. She followed, though I didn't know it until afterward. She was watching as I

knocked on the door of this room. Marshall answered the door and I stabbed him in the heart. Booth came at me and I threw the knife and got him squarely in the heart, also; then I got out of there fast, leaving the bodies lying on the floor."

"It doesn't quite fit," said Johnny. "The part about Nancy seeing Barry and Elaine walking along the hall. That happened after I'd gone down and joined Barry and Mark in the grill." He frowned. "No, it still could have happened. After she saw the couple walking along the hall, Nancy went past this room and saw the bodies lying on the floor. She then went back to our room and stayed there a while before finally going down and finding Mark and Barry in the grill."

"That's right," said Lanceford, he turned to Drake. "When Farrell and I came up here with Morton I saw someone had moved the bodies and the bear was in one of the twin beds in this room."

"So you talked Mark into putting me to bed in this room," said Johnny. As he looked at his partner he found Barry Lanceford was a man he had never really known at all. Mark had been so right about that. "You did it deliberately, hoping I'd at least be suspected of the murders. You must have come back later and planted the blood-stained knife in my suitcase."

"Since I've admitted so much there's no point in denying that," Lanceford said. "I thought you were waking up while I was in the room, so I was forced to hit you with a heavy ashtray and knock you out, Johnny."

"I still don't understand why King was so anxious to get the diamonds," said Johnny.

"He owes me a lot of money," said Lanceford. "I told him I had to have it at once when I saw him in the lobby last night. I guess I must have sounded as if I would kill him if I didn't get it right away."

"That was my impression," said Stanton King, as he appeared in the doorway, looking as much like a clothing store dummy as usual. "I was frightened—desperate—and really did believe Morton had murdered Marshall and stolen the diamonds. I must have been crazy, trying to scare you by giving that death-threat note I wrote to Mrs. Morton." The hotel manager scowled. "But where are the diamonds?"

"In a drawer in my desk at the office," said Lanceford. "I took them last night."

"Looks like the case is about closed," said Ward, with a sigh of relief. "I'm sure tired taking notes on it."

"I—I feel faint," Lanceford said suddenly. "Everything is going black. My heart—"

He staggered to the open window. For an instant he stood there, then before anyone could reach him he toppled forward. The upper part of his body slid out over the sill and his feet followed. In a moment he was gone. From outside came a faint, thin cry and then the dull thud of a body landing eleven stories below.

"He always did make a good exit," Adam Dabney said bleakly.

"It's all right, Johnny," Drake said. "It's over now. You run along and find Mrs. Morton. We'll get in touch with Mark Farrell and have him take care of all the things that have to be done. After all, he was Lanceford's partner, too. Don't forget you're on your honeymoon."

"Complete with homicide," said Ward dryly.

"Thanks, Captain," said Johnny.

He walked out of the room, and on along the hall toward the elevators, then glanced at his wrist-watch. It was a quarter after four. He hoped Nancy and Maisie had returned from their shopping trip by the time he got back to the Eastside Hotel.

A line of odd tracks in the snow, running from the woods to the side door of a nearby house, then back to the woods again, bespoke an ancient evil. And Simon Ark, who sought out such things, found a nearly-perfect crime...

THE HOOFS OF SATAN

Simon Ark story

by EDWARD D. HOCH

THE VILLAGE of North Bradshire is much the same as a thousand others that dot the English countryside. It lies at the edge of a great forest, on one of the main highways from London to the coast, a relic of the Middle Ages that somehow survived to the Twentieth Century.

If the traveler is curious enough, he can find the history of the village engraved on a bronze plaque in the town square. But time and the weather have made the few short paragraphs almost unreadable. It really didn't matter, anyway, because everyone knew of the famous battle that had made the name of North Bradshire famous in the pages of history. The fact that the Battle had been fought nearly a thousand years earlier did not bother the present Citizens in the least. For North Bradshire was a town that lived in the past.

It was not until the late winter of 1954 that another event occurred to bring public attention to the village. And, as before, this second event brought Death, as well as Fame, to North Bradshire...

It was a cold morning in early March, and the four inches of snow from the previous day remained on the ground, covering the fields with an unbroken white coat. Unbroken, that is, except for the single line of odd tracks that ran from the woods to the side door of a nearby house, and then back to the woods again. The milkman,

making his usual morning rounds, was the first to notice the tracks in the snow.

He told others about them, and the word spread swiftly, as it does in places like North Bradshire. By noon of that day, half of England knew about the tracks in the snow.

That was why, on the afternoon express to North Bradshire, two men sat in a coach discussing the odd occurrence.

One was Chief Inspector Ashly of New Scotland Yard, a short, almost tiny man who nevertheless had the deep thundering voice of a much bigger man. "My voice never fails to amaze people," he was saying, "It is, perhaps, my greatest asset." He paused a moment and studied the big man with the placid face in the seat opposite him.

"What did you say your name was?" the Chief Inspector asked.

"I didn't." He exhaled a thick cloud of blue tobacco smoke, which hung suspended in the air between them. "But the name is Simon Ark. I, also, am on my way to North Bradshire."

"About these tracks in the snow?"

The man called Simon Ark nodded. He was a heavy, well-built person, who might have been extremely handsome twenty years ago. But now his flabby face and wrinkled brow gave him the appearance of a man much older than he actually was.

The train rumbled on, through the white-covered fields, and occasionally through a patch of woods where the thick branches had protected the grounds from the snow.

Simon Ark shifted his gaze from the beauties of the English countryside, and asked, "Since when do prints in the snow bring Chief Inspectors from Scotland Yard to investigate?"

Inspector Ashly frowned. "The circumstances involved are most peculiar. Of course, since the news of these latest tracks interested you, also, I imagine you are well aware of the legend."

Simon Ark nodded. "Although I would not exactly call it a legend. Even though it happened a hundred years ago, the story is certainly true. The people of Devonshire and several other villages awoke one morning to find strange cloven hoof-prints in the fresh snow. The tracks were single, and in a perfectly straight line, about eight inches apart, as if made by some one-legged animal running across the snow. But they were the tracks of no known creature. The tracks led across fields, over fences and rivers, and even over the roofs of houses. The townspeople followed the trail with dogs; but when they reached the woods nearby, the dogs commenced to howl and refused to go further. The legend grew that the strange foot or hoof-prints had been made by the devil himself. In later years, similar prints were discovered in the snow at other places in the area, but no satisfactory explanation was ever arrived at."

The Inspector looked at Simon Ark with new admiration. "I see you've made quite a study of the matter."

"I have made a study of all the strange and unexplained happenings during the past several centuries. I find it a fascinating hobby."

"Might I inquire as to what your real occupation is?"

Simon Ark's thick lips twisted into what might have been a smile. "I fear, my dear Inspector, that you wouldn't believe me if I told you."

THEY RODE in silence for some time after that, until Simon Ark said, "You still haven't told me why the police are interested in this matter."

The Inspector shrugged. "As you remarked, sir, you wouldn't believe me if I told you."

The train roared through a tunnel, then into the afternoon light once more. Ahead, stretching out along both sides

of the tracks, they could see the groups of tiny shops and houses that made up the village of North Bradshire. "This is it," Inspector Ashly remarked, as he rose from his seat...

This was indeed it. Inspector Ashly was met at the station by a portly, middle-aged man who was revealed to be the mayor of North Bradshire.

Mayor Beverson was a very excited man. "Tracks in the snow, Inspector. I saw them myself; this isn't like the other times."

Inspector Ashly grunted doubtfully. "Mayor Beverson, I must warn you that we believe this to be another publicity stunt dreamed up by yourself to keep North Bradshire on the front pages of the newspapers." He half turned to Simon Ark, who had followed him off the train. "We expect a great many tourists to come over this summer for the Festival of Britain. The mayor, here, apparently is attempting to attract visitors to his town by using any number of quaint devices."

Mayor Beverson had grown gradually pale with anger as the Inspector spoke. Now, when he replied, his words tumbled over each other, making his whole speech almost incoherent. "This is not a publicity-stunt of any kind, Inspector. I will admit that the other events of the past week were planned, but I knew nothing of this. And I certainly did not ask anyone to send you up here. In fact, what are you...?"

Inspector Ashly held up a thick hand to silence the mayor. "All right, all right! Take us to see these tracks of yours."

The mayor shrugged, and turning, led the way down the winding white road. Behind him, Inspector Ashly, Simon Ark, and a score of the townspeople followed.

They passed the usual English country houses, lining the quiet road like silent sentries. Finally they halted before an old house that was small in comparison to the others. A tall, blond man of uncertain age came out to greet them, and the curious townspeople pressed closer.

The mayor cleared his throat, as if about to give a speech. "This is Mr. Roland Summers. The...tracks are on his property."

Roland Summers held out a muscular hand to greet Inspector Ashly, but the Scotland Yard man ignored it. "Summers? Summers? That name is familiar."

The tall man smiled slightly. "I was on the stage for some time, in the ballet; you might have seen me."

Ashly snorted. "I doubt it. Let's see these tracks of yours."

ROLAND SUMMERS led the small group around to the side of the house. There were no breaks in the virgin snow. It stretched as far as the eye could see; a white vastness that seemed to reflect the awful whiteness of the winter sky.

Then they saw it.

From the woods a quarter of a mile away, there stretched a single line of indentations in the snow. They were almost round, and ran in a single line, each print being about eight inches from the previous one. They might have been the hoof-prints of some one-legged beast.

Simon Ark's eyes followed the prints across the snow from the woods to the house, and then back into the woods again.

Inspector Ashly grunted and bent over, studying the prints. "They're all practically identical; there must be some animal..."

"Some animal with one leg?" Simon Ark asked.

"Those are not the tracks of any animal I have ever seen," Mayor Beverson insisted.

"Mr. Summers," the Inspector turned to the tall man, "did you hear any unusual noises during the night?"

"None, Inspector. But then, I'm a very sound sleeper."

Ashly grunted. "This...thing...apparently came right up to your back door. Was anything taken?"

"No, Inspector, the door was locked from the inside. Whatever it was couldn't have gotten in."

Ashly turned back to the mayor. "I suggest you call all zoos within fifty miles of here and find out if any animals have escaped."

As Mayor Beverson moved off to carry out the assignment, Simon Ark spoke from the edge of the group. "Inspector, it might be advisable to get some dogs on the trail of this thing. It may be in the woods nearby."

The man from Scotland Yard seemed puzzled for a moment; then his face cleared. "Oh, yes. According to the legend, the dogs always stopped at the edge of the woods. All right, we can try it if you find some dogs."

Ten minutes later, Simon Ark had obtained four large hunting dogs, and they were ready to start. Mayor Beverson returned with the news that no animals had escaped from nearby zoos, and the news failed to surprise anyone. None of them really believed that the tracks in the snow had been made by something as simple as an animal. Or at least none of them wanted to believe it, for as much as they dreaded the other alternative, the thought of it was somehow fascinating.

But the expedition was postponed for a few moments by the arrival of a strikingly beautiful woman.

Diana Hunt was one of those women who was always unpopular with members of her own sex, while at the same time having a great attraction for the opposite sex. She was dressed in riding clothes, and her jet-black hair hung halfway down her back. But it was her eyes that Simon Ark noticed first. They seemed almost to be separate living pools, completely detached from the remainder of her mask-like face.

Simon Ark bowed slightly when she was introduced to him. "I have seen you on the screen many times, Miss Hunt." Until her marriage two years ago to a wealthy manufacturer, Diana Hunt had been one of England's most glamorous motion picture stars. Now, as the wife of a socially prominent businessman, she had settled down to a quiet life in the country.

Diana Hunt flashed one of her famous smiles. "The name is now Mrs. Mark Eagen. I have retired from the films."

"Where is your husband this morning, Mrs. Eagen?" Mayor Beverson inquired.

The smile vanished for an instant, then reappeared. "He's gone to London on business, he should return later in the day."

"I suggest we get on the trail of this thing at once," Inspector Ashly said. "It's already got a twelve-hour start on us."

THE OTHERS agreed, and the small band started out, led by the dogs. Simon Ark brought up the rear with Mrs. Eagen and Roland Summers.

"Really, Diana," Summers was saying, "you should go back to the house; there's no telling what we may find out here."

Diana frowned. "They must expect to find something, or else why send a Scotland Yard man?" She hurried ahead to join the others.

Simon Ark watched her long legs kicking up snow as she ran. "What is her husband's business. Mr. Summers?"

Roland Summers hesitated. "Why, I believe Mark Eagen is in the chemical industry. He owns a small but profitable plant that manufactures dry ice and other chemical refrigerants."

"Dry ice?" Simon Ark repeated with interest.

"Yes. He often takes long trips about the country on business. I'm afraid his wife finds it very lonely here. He rarely takes her with him."

"I'm sure that a beautiful woman like Mrs. Eagen would never be too lonely," Simon Ark replied.

Summers grunted. He was watching the group ahead with keen interest now. They were almost to the point where the odd tracks disappeared into the woods.

Once into the densely-wooded area, the hoof-prints became harder to follow. Little snow had fallen here, and the ground, for the most part, was covered with damp leaves.

They had gone about fifty yards into the woods when suddenly the four hunting dogs stopped dead in their tracks and began to howl.

Simon Ark glanced quickly around and saw the expression of terror and disbelief of their faces.

Inspector Ashly pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

The four dogs continued their mournful howling...

Gradually, like some evil demon slipping over them, night came to the quiet English countryside, giving the snow a darker hue that seemed somehow in keeping with events of the day. The people had returned to their homes, but in everyone's mind was the same thought. Would the thing come again tonight...?

Simon Ark and Inspector Ashly sat facing each other across one of the ancient oak tables in the local pub. They had consumed a few beers and a little time, while waiting for darkness.

"I still can't understand why the dogs acted that way this afternoon," Ashly said.

"I fear that there is something of great evil hiding in those woods," Simon Ark remarked.

"Don't tell me you believe this legend about the devil coming to the village!"

Simon Ark's face grew serious, and deep furrows appeared in his brow. "I believe that Satan did visit North Bradshire last night."

"What?"

"And he's still here, out in those woods, waiting..." Simon Ark rose and walked toward the door. "Please excuse me, Inspector, but I have a few calls to make."

HE CONTINUED down the lonely street, his dim eyes seemingly intent upon the glistering snowflakes that now and then drifted down from the black void above. Ahead, he caught a glimpse of Mayor Beverson hurrying across the street on some mission of his own.

Simon Ark paused for a moment in the town square, and tried to read the bronze plaque that rested there, but the single street light served only to cast dim shadows over it. After a time, he gave it up and moved on.

His first stop was the small home of Roland Summers. He rang the bell twice and waited, but no one came. After a few minutes' wait, he tried the knob and found the door unlocked.

Inside, a single light burned in the study, and another came from a stairway that apparently led to the basement. From there came the regular sounds of an axe hitting wood. Simon Ark descended the treacherous steps and found Summers swinging the axe at a decaying tree trunk which lay in a damp spot on the floor.

"Oh! It's you, Ark. Sorry I didn't hear the bell; I was busy chopping up some firewood."

"You seeem to have enough of it there. That trunk must weigh over a hundred pounds."

Summers grunted and took a few more swings with the axe. "It's all damp and decayed. I'm afraid it won't be any good for firewood after all." He tossed the axe down in disgust and smiled slightly. "Well, enough of that. Let's go upstairs and have a drink, Mr. Ark."

Simon Ark followed him upstairs and accepted a partly-filled glass of scotch and water.

"Just what is your capacity in this investigation, Mr. Ark? Are you with Scotland Yard, also?" Summers downed his drink.

"Oh, heavens, no! I'm just what you might call an interested party."

Roland Summers grunted. "I suppose it's the factory on the other side of the woods that makes this whole thing so important, eh?"

"Factory? What factory?" Simon Ark's eyebrows went up with interest.

"Oh, I thought everyone knew about the factory. It's some kind of a super-secret defense plant, probably making atomic bombs, or something."

"So that's why Scotland Yard takes such an interest in the area."

Summers nodded, "Every time something happens up here, we're immediately investigated by the Yard, Army Intelligence, and several other government agencies."

Simon Ark lit a cigaret and appeared to study a faded painting on the opposite wall. "The Inspector mentioned something about Mayor Beverson's attempts to get publicity for the town."

The other man laughed. "Yes, he's trying to attract tourists for the big festival this summer. But this doesn't look to me like one of his stunts."

"To tell you the truth," Simon Ark commented, "this doesn't look like much of anything to me."

Summers answered with a questioning stare.

"I've made quite a study of the odd appearances of tracks at Devonshire and other cities during the last century," the heavy man began. "These things in your back yard, while admittedly not the prints of any known animal, certainly bear little resemblance to drawings of the Devonshire tracks. And I'm at somewhat of a loss to understand why the comparison was ever made. I came up here to investigate what I believed to be a supernational occurance, and I find instead a publicity-seeking mayor, a spy-hunting Inspector, and ex-movie queen." He took another puff on his cigaret and then ground it out in the ash tray. "Which reminds me, I have another stop to make tonight. If you'll excuse me, Mr. Summers. . ."

"Certainly. Glad you dropped in. How long do you expect to remain in town?"

Simon Ark's lips curled in what might have been a thin smile. "I hope to finish my business tonight."

OUTSIDE, IT was snowing harder now, at times all but obscuring vision. In another hour, the mysterious tracks would disappear forever.

It took him a few moments to discover in which house Mr. and Mrs. Mark Eagen lived. When he found it, he was not surprised. It was apparently the largest house in town, with arches, gables and pillars stretching into the sky in a sort of quiet mockery of the staid English architecture that dominated the rest of the town.

He rang the bell and waited. Presently the door was opened by Mrs. Eagen herself, looking more like the old Diana Huntress than ever.

"Come in, Mr. . . . ?"

"Ark. Simon Ark. I'd like to talk to you."

She wore a simple green dress that seemed to add to her beauty in some unexplainable way. Simon followed her into the living room, where she poured two drinks in silence. "I saw you with the Inspector this morning," she said finally. "Are you a detective?"

He moved his great bulk in the narrow confines of the chair and took a sip of the drink she'd offered him. "Not exactly. I really came over here to speak to your husband, Mrs. Eagen; has he returned?"

"No," she answered simply. They sat in silence for another few mo-

ments before she continued. "Well, I might as well tell someone. The whole town will know in another day or two."

Simon Ark sat very still and waited.

"The truth is, Mr. Ark, that my husband has left me. He departed during the night without a word."

"Did you have a quarrel?"

"Yes. He . . . he had some foolish idea about me seeing too much of our neighbor, Roland Summers. Of course he's always been jealous, ever since he married me."

Simon Ark nodded. "I can understand his concern. You have no idea where he has gone?"

"None whatever. For a time, I thought he would return; but now I fear he is gone for good."

"Could I see a picture of your husband, please?"

She rose and walked to the fireplace. The framed photograph she returned with showed her in a wedding gown, accompanied by a small, pleasant-looking man who appeared to be about forty years old.

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Eagen. I'll no doubt be talking to you again later."

And then he was out in the street again, where the snow was still falling.

He knew where he was going next, yet he was mildly surprised when his feet carried him around to the back of the line of houses, and he headed steadily toward the woods.

Once more the snow had covered everything, obscuring the tracks of the night before. He reached the edge of the woods and paused a second, listening.

But he heard nothing . . .

Nothing . . .

The white curtain of snow in front of him, the black curtain of trees behind him . . .

He waited . . .

Presently he moved on, carefully examining the ground at his feet. Somewhere a dog howled . . .

He paused . . .

And heard it. The soundless noise of hoofbeats in the snow . . .

It was coming again, as it had the night before, and as it might continue to . . .

He waited . . .

A dark shape formed against the white background. Closer . . .

BUT IT was not a devil; only Inspector Ashly.

"Ark! What are you doing out here?"

"Solving your mystery for you, Inspector. I know what made those tracks. And the thing you want is here in the woods, now!"

"Satan?" The Inspector was laughing.

"I told you there was a great evil in these woods, and I was right."

"Ark, if you're referring to the government's factory on the other side . . . "

"No, Inspector, this evil is much more ancient than atomic bombs."

"What, then?"

Simon Ark spoke grimly. "We need men, a lot of them. And some searchlights. We're going into the woods. Now! Tonight!"

"But, why? What did you see in this village that I missed? How do you know it's in the woods now?"

Simon Ark said very quietly, "Because a man was chopping wood in his basement . . .

Roland Summers opened the door and greeted Simon Ark with a smile. "Well, back again!"

"Yes, Mr. Summers."

"What's all the activity in the woods? There seems to be a lot of men back there. And spotlights."

"That's right. They're digging." Simon Ark followed him into the small book-lined study.

"Digging? For what?"

"They're searching for the body of

Mr. Mark Eagen, the man you murdered last night . . ."

"The evil that came to North Bradshire last night was of a very ancient type—lust for another man's wife." Simon Ark spoke quietly, his eyes never leaving the pale face of Roland Summers.

"And the devil was here last night, Mr. Summers. But he wasn't out there making tracks in the snow. He was inside of you, when you killed Diana Hunt's husband."

"I . . . you're crazy."

"I don't suppose it was premeditated. He came to your house to tell you to keep away from his wife. There was a fight, and you killed him. Then you were faced with the problem that always confronts murderers; you had to get rid of the body. It couldn't be left in your house. You decided the best thing would be to bury it. But the ground was frozen; covered with snow, except in the woods where the trees protected the ground. So you decided to carry the body from your house to the woods and bury it."

ROLAND SUMMERS sat frozen to the chair. His cigaret had almost burned down to his fingers.

"But that immediately presented a problem. A fresh snow had fallen, making the area you had to cross a spotless white carpet. In the morning, someone would be sure to notice the footprints leading from your house to the woods and back again. And if Diana Hunt became alarmed at her husband's absence, the police might have connected his disappearance with the footprint's leading from your house to the woods. So you devised a way to make your tracks look like those of an animal."

"Those didn't look like any animal tracks." Summer's face had turned ashen now.

"No, but they might have passed an uninterested observer. They were better than footprints, anyway. Unfortunately for you, Mayor Beverson saw another opportunity to publicize his town; he called attention to the fact that they slightly resembled some mysterious tracks found in the area a hundred years ago. That was what really spoiled things for you; because sooner or later someone was sure to realize that the prints didn't necessarily start and end in the woods. They could just as well have started and returned to to your house."

"And . . . and how do you suggest I was able to make almost round indentations like those in the snow?" He seemed almost afraid of the answer he knew would come.

Simon Ark said, "Very simple. They are the prints of the toes of ballet shoes or slippers. When you carried Mark Eagen into the woods, you walked on your toes . . ."

The cigaret fell from Roland Summers' limp fingers.

"I know it sounds fantastic, even to carry a small man any distance while keeping on your toes, but a skilled ballet dancer like yourself must have much strength in his legs. And

putting one foot directly ahead of the other when you walked would also be simple for you."

Roland Summers was staring at him with glassy eyes.

"Of course, the howling dogs this afternoon suggested that there was something, possibly a body, buried in those woods. And Mark Eagen was the only person who had disappeared last night. The prints, which were the only ones between the town and the woods, came from your house, which made you the logical suspect."

Simon Ark paused and listened to the renewed voice from the direction of the woods. Then he continued.

"And when I found you chopping up that old tree trunk in your basement, I was certain. It was obviously no good for firewood, and it had just as obviously been carried from the woods recently. Yet there were none of your footprints in the snow—only the odd cleverest part of your whole scheme. You carried a hundred-pound corpse into the woods, so you carried a hundred-pound tree stump out of the woods, thus making sure that the depth of the tracks in the snow was about the same, both coming and going. Otherwise, it would have been obvious that something had been carried into the woods."

Roland Summers continued to sit stiffly in the chair . . .

Simon Ark was closing the door behind him when Inspector Ashly came up. "We dug up Eagen's body, Mr. Ark. It was where you said, near the spot where the dogs started howling. Is Summers inside?"

"Yes, he is. . ."

"I suppose Eagen's wife was the cause of it all."

But Simon Ark did not reply. He was walking slowly through the snow to the road.

Inspector Ashly opened the door and went into Roland Summers' house. He found Summers in the study, still staring at the wall with glassy eyes. . .

He was pulling a pair of handcuffs from his pocket when he suddenly realized that Roland Summers was dead . . .

A HEAVY fog was obscuring London the next day, as Inspector Ashly sat in the office of his superior.

The man behind the desk shuffled some papers and said, "Summers apparently died of heart failure, as a result of some great shock. It all seems very odd, especially since he died while he was alone with this man, Simon Ark, who now seems to have vanished completely."

Ashly frowned and spoke very slowly. "It may sound fantastic, sir, but somehow I don't believe that Simon Ark belonged to our world. He came to North Bradshire because he believed he might find the devil there; instead he found only a murderer."

"What do you mean, he thought he would find the devil? Why should anyone go looking for the devil?"

Ashly rose and walked to the window, where he stood looking out at the the grey mist that hung like a curtain over the city. "I don't exactly know, sir, but I found this on the table next to Roland Summers' body. Simon Ark must have left it there."

And he took a small wooden object from his pocket and held it out for his superior to see. It was shaped like the letter T, with a small circle on top, and it appeared to be very old.

"What is it, Ashly?"

"At the museum they told me it was an ansated cross, an early symbol of Egyptian Christians . . ."

"Egyptian . . ."

"I know it seems fantastic, sir, but I believe Simon Ark is searching for Satan. I believe he has been searching for a long, long time. I wonder what will happen when they meet . . ."

★

"...And He But Naked..."

by JOHN TARA

The unknown killer was no fool; he knew that the victim would be identified in time. So ... he had merely insured that identification would be impossible for a day or two. Why?

What stronger breastplate than a heart untainted?
Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just.
And he but naked though lock'd up in steel
Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted.
"Part Two, King Henry the 6th"
—*William Shakespeare*

DETECTIVE Cesare (Chesty by common necessity) Borgia, shifted his worn velvet homburg to the back of his head and listened to the gangling, nervous youth in the back room of the bar for about five minutes. Then he made up his mind. Smith—Borgia had started making it up when he heard the name—was groggy from fright, and half-faint with hunger. Finally, Borgia opened the door into the musty, dingy bar-room and pushed toward the free-lunch.

"Eat," the fat little detective said, loudly enough for the bartender to hear. The man averted his eyes. When Smith had finished, Borgia nodded him toward the door and turned to the bar. "Next time I'll lift your license—with a meathook. *Pace,*" he said pleasantly and went out.

Outside, Borgia got Smith into his official car, looked at his watch and decided he had just time to deliver the live body, have lunch and then take a look at the dead one in the morgue. He drove 210 to the next intersection and headed out into the country. The car turned off the macadam a mile down the road at an oiled-dirt lane. Gradually trees appeared out of the prairie, like lone policemen, and slowly multiplied into squads and companies. A wooden road sign read, suddenly: *Monastery of St. Bartholomew.* A minute more, and buildings loomed up through the densely-planted stands of pine and cedar. Borgia brought the car to a stop about a hundred feet from the low stone wall that circled the monastery, got out and pointed to the gate. "You don't *have* to go in there," he said. "You can beat it anywhere you like, further from home if you want to. But I thought it might help to talk things over with the Fathers. You haven't gone very far wrong yet."

Smith's adam's-apple bulged. "How do you know?"

"It takes time; you haven't had enought of it. Dumb luck and God's mercy." The little detective laughed

frankly and patted his bulging corporation. His thick black moustache quivered, but the sand-colored eyes were as edged as swords, quieter than coffins.

Smith stood and shivered in the early autumn air. He stared at the monastery, deep in its cloak of tall towers and towering trees, belted by the stone wall. An hour before, his eyes had been feverish over the dice in the bar's back room. They had dimmed to the color of stones when Borgia booted the door open, casually showed his badge and let the prey —a boozy bar-fly—ooze back to a bar stool.

"There's *always* hope," Borgia said, with genuine pity.

"Hope?" Smith said doubtfully.

"You have hope; I have faith. In there..." Borgia again pointed to the gate. "In there they have charity, too; even your fare back home. Say a prayer for me and the Fathers at Compline, will you?"

Smith hesitated, goggling. "A prayer? Sure. But why—well, what in hell does a cop or priests need with a prayer?"

"I haven't a badge to prove it," the little man said, opening the car door, "but I'm a sinner and so are the fellows in there."

HE DIDN'T look back. On 210 again he was held up by slowing, city-bound traffic and wished the department was a little better staffed so a first-grade detective didn't have to run out every time a grifter game got under way in some slob's bar. He turned off 210 at *Gino's Pizza House,* parked the car and nodded to Gino as he went in.

"All right," Gino said saturninely from behind the cash desk. "*Bon appetit,* as if you needed it."

Borgia pushed his way through the crowded dining room to the big hot kitchen where Albergi, the chef, beamed and pointed to a pot simmering on the biggest stove. A dozen clams boiled and bubbled amid herbs. "A moment Cesare; a superb clam sauce."

Borgia shucked his jacket, hung up his hat carefully and proceeded to wrap himself around two pounds of spaghetti with clam sauce at a table reserved for the staff. The help watched in admiration, occasionally muttering *bravos.*

"*Basta,*" Borgia murmured reverentially to himself at last, finished his split of wine and bowed out of the kitchen. At the desk he tossed two dollars and change to Gino and selected half a dozen twisted Italian cigars from a glass bowl on the counter. "This will pay for everything," he said. "Tomorrow I will have something else."

"Yes," Gino began in his deep voice. "Something different, like Italian cuisine. Vary the monotony, Cesare; have you ever heard of Chinese food?"

"A celestial place on Hoosier Boulevard serves a fine minestrone—not as good as yours or my wife's."

"You are set in your ways, Cesare," Gino rumbled. "You are not modern. People who do not move with the times get nowhere."

"Nobody is going anywhere, though they may think they are. Tomorrow—"

"Tomorrow, lasagne. Where are you off to, without coffee?"

"To look at a corpse. Why else should I have wanted a full stomach fast?"

On 210 again, heading cityward, he remembered that he also had an appointment that evening to convoy a priest and a reliquary to a plane. The traffic stopped and then started again toward the city, a jewel of the midwest, polished brighter by the recent beatification of a Hoosier saint-to-be whose relics were, eventually, to be inclosed in the reliquary. Suddenly, Borgia sat up hard behind the wheel. A kid, about sixteen, was walking in the opposite direction along the road, partly hidden by the faster-moving cars outbound from the city. A chill coursed down the little man's plumply cushioned spine. The boy's head was bowed as though with grief; his arms hung

limply; and he had been heedlessly walking with the traffic instead of against it. A glance ahead and back demonstrated Borgia's entrapment in the traffic. With a lump of lead in his stomach atop the spaghetti, he crawled tensely into town at ten miles an hour.

At the hospital where the morgue was located, he phoned his wife Rosa to tell her that he would not be home for supper to assist in the family's annihilation of her superb *manicotti*. After hanging up on the lamenting Rosa, he phoned headquarters to dispatch a patrol car out on 210 to pick up the kid. Then he took the elevator to the morgue.

A DEAD-PAN female nurse let him into the chill room and he waited while Dr. Griffin, who doubled as coroner, was summoned from his rounds. A few moments later the medico came in, unbottoning his white gown. Griffin, tall, bald, dry and sardonic, lit a cigaret and saw Borgia standing before him in the cold, gloomy room like a rotund bug. He touched a wall switch and ceiling fluorescents blazed.

"The chief called half an hour ago," Griff said, grabbing for the handle of the wall iceboxes. "He's asking for miracles."

"Like Lazarus?" Borgia said, lighting a cigar.

"Like Sherlock Holmes. A question of identity. Not, of course, that you have ever seen this gentleman before."

The sliding slab, rolling on bearings from its niche in the wall came to a halt with a hollow crash. Borgia looked down at the corpse and shivered in the nimbus of icy air that was its only shroud.

"There is nothing frightening about death, my dear Borgia," Griffin said, smiling cynically. "Even your ancestors knew that."

"Try it sometime, doctor," Borgia suggested, frowning.

Griffin became professional. He indicated the neck regions. "Death was instantaneous. Neck broken in one place—which was enough. The point of impact that did it is clear enough." He touched the deeply-bruised chin with one yellowed finger.

"It is murder," Borgia said with concentration and noted something in his notebook. "No reasonable fall could have killed him that way—and if he had died in such fashion he'd be bruised otherwise, and in other places as well."

"You could have let me say all that," Griffin remarked, reproachfully.

"Next time," Borgia said amiably; "I let you say it the last time. Where is his upper plate?"

Griffin returned from another, shallower wall drawer, from which he had produced a bundle of clothes, a panama hat and shoes.

"Missing, but he had had one," the doctor said. "A man his build doesn't stay that way munching mush. The bridgework on the lower jaw is gone, too."

"Ripped out," the detective observed. He shook out the bundle of clothes. On the lapel of the coat were dark smudges, showing up against the darker color of the material.

"Blood from the chin bruises," the doctor said.

"No. That blood was simply squeezed through the abraded skin of the chin. There isn't enough of it to make smudges that size. It came from the murderer's knuckles. Try smashing your fist against a stone wall and watch it bleed." His eyes widened. "Where is the shirt, the tie?"

"There wasn't any."

Suddenly, with a start, Borgia crossed himself.

Griffin smiled. "I still say he can't hurt you."

Borgia looked up apologetically as if coming out of a dream. "I'm sorry, doctor. To a Protestant, it probably would seem like some sort of cabalistic

nonsense; a Catholic would understand it. The sign of the cross is an invocation, but it is also a sign against evil. I can't help crossing myself when I sense it."

"What kind of evil?" the doctor asked, impatiently. "Do you notice a brand, or a soul-stain? Are the features of the corpse innately foul or spiritually filthy? Is there some kind of secret sign among the brotherhoods of blood and violence?" He made a sound of disgust. "Can't you see how close that sort of thing is to witchmarks and divination?"

"IT WOULD be," Borgia said calmly, "if that was what I meant; but it isn't. It was you, doctor, who spoke of signs and portents, evil spirits and incantations. I mean solid things, like that body and its clothes and the absence of some of them. Whoever broke that poor man's neck removed every trace of identity. Didn't you notice that even the normal accumulation of dust has been brushed out of the pockets and the trouser cuffs, and that the cleaner's marks were torn away?"

"I'd have done that myself, maybe, had I been the murderer."

"Of course. *But why?* It would be very easy to identify this body, given a week; but to do it in a day or so would be impossible. And that's why anything that could be traced was removed, including the upper plate and the bridge-work—to make the impossible doubly impossible—to provide an absolutely surety of no more than a day or two to accomplish whatever the body got in the way of when this man was alive. And that's what I meant by evil."

"Another murder?" Griffin asked.

The little detective shook his head. "Why should one murder pave the way to another? We are not dealing with a murderer who is a madman, here, but with a very sane and clever mind. One interested, say, in money and lots of it."

"And covering the tracks to it," Griffin mused; "a robbery, then."

The face of the little detective cleared of all expression as though it had been washed with a spiritual sponge. "Yes," he said. "It stinks of evil."

"I dislike murder and robberies, but they fail to make me shudder," the doctor observed wearily. "I don't suppose you're referring to a particularly degrading form of the confidence game, are you? Or perhaps there is a morally fouler way then I know of to commit larceny?"

"I know there is," Borgia said quietly. "But did it ever occur to you that murder is really the worst crime in the world? And that if anything follows it might be almost as horrible, if it weren't another murder?"

Griffin said nothing for a moment, then he glanced at the corpse.

"Will he be here long?" the doctor asked.

"Not very long; the murderer shouldn't be too hard to find." Borgia stood in the harsh, bright light, his eyes inward pools of reflection and compassion. "If only by contrast."

"Surely you aren't going to say that you can tell a murderer because he looks like one?" Griffin asked, astonished.

Borgia opened the morgue-room door. "Hardly," he said. "But they can often be spotted when they are trying very hard not to."

Five minutes later he parked in front of headquarters. Sergeant Fawcett at the desk, hailed him as he came in. "Hunt Durham just phoned. Said his kid beat it. Must be the one you spotted on 210. They haven't found him, yet."

Borgia nodded. "Did Durham pick up that Eastern priest?"

"He's in—name of Father Hayter. Durham and Murphy met him at the station and Murphy drove them back to Durham's place. They're both on

their way over here now about the kid."

On the way upstairs to his office, Borgia stopped at the chief's office, and stuck his head in. Hendrickson, a flabby hulk with keen penetrating eyes dark in cigar smoke, stuck his own out from behind a newspaper. Borgia reported on the corpse.

"Can I give it to the papers?" Hendrickson asked.

Borgia nodded. "And put every patrol car on the alert. There may be something else cooking. Peel their eyes for a man about six feet tall and powerful enough to knock a man the same size down and break his neck doing it. He will also be very intelligent and wily."

"Can I tell the papers we're expecting an arrest within twenty-four hours?"

"Why not?" Borgia smiled. "Don't we always? Besides, I have a feeling that whatever our criminal may do is bound to be spectacular. The spectacular is almost always blundered."

BEHIND his own desk a few yards up the corridor, Borgia relaxed for a moment. In a couple of hours it would be time for him to go to St. Catherine's and help convoy the reliquary Hunt Durham would present to Father Hayter. Durham, who owned a meat-packing plant, had been chosen to make the presentation speech, though more on the grounds of a growling sense of humor than his preeminence on a pile of cans. After a time the fat little man got up and went to the water cooler in the corner of the room, opened the little iron door which allowed access for repairs and took out a wrapped bottle of wine. He had purchased it on his way to work, having intended to share it ultimately with his wife and three daughters (none of them named Lucretia) over the *manicotti*. He poured a little wine in a paper cup and was lifting it to his lips when the door burst open.

Unceremoniously a worried Hunt Durham walked in, followed by a priest. Durham was large, aggressive, bull-faced and bull-voiced, and known locally as "Bull" Durham. Borgia bowed to the priest whose neat black hat sat over square, bluff features.

"Father Hayter," Durham said gruffly; "Detective Chesty Borgia."

"Borgia?" the priest asked, surprised, while shaking the little man's hand.

"*Cesare*, what is more, Father," Borgia said genially, turning to set out two more paper cups. He waved his visitors to chairs.

"My father was not only a descendant of, but also a great admirer of the *Gonfaloniere*. I fear, however, that he never quite realized what a handicap a handle like that was going to be."

"Gonfaloniere?" Father Hayter asked, smiling in puzzlement.

"Oh, that was my ancestor's title as head of the Papal army."

"A bit of a poisoner, wasn't he?" The priest asked.

"A tough egg, yes," Borgia admitted. "But everybody was during the *cinquecento*. But—and I know anything a Borgia says has to be suspect, even though I'm saying it—he was hardly the monster history has made him out to be." Borgia laughed.

"Perhaps I was thinking of another Borgia," the priest said, joining in the laugh. "The lot of them had—saving your presence, sir—a bad reputation, as I recall."

"My boy back yet?" Durham asked worriedly, tossing off the cup of wine the detective handed him.

"He'll be back. How far could he get?" Borgia said encouragingly. "I spotted him myself, Bull." He watched Durham nervously pour another cup of wine for himself. "Have some wine, Father."

The priest hesitated. "I'm not sure I approve of drinking at all," he said slowly. "Particularly, for a man of the cloth, it might not be wise to indulge,

particularly before the dinner—dear me!" He sat back suddenly. Durham had knocked the wine bottle over in his nervousness, making the wine splash over the desk top. Borgia dashed about for old newspapers to soak up the red fluid.

The priest wiped himself dry with a handkerchief as the detective righted the bottle and spread the papers. "No, no, Mr. Durham," the priest said deprecatingly. "After all, a man whose son has disappeared—well, I think it understandable—" A gesture waived apologies.

"I *am* nervous, Father," Durham said and looked up at Borgia.

"What happened, Bull?" The detective asked, quietly.

An ugly frown crossed the industrialist's face. "Tim's turned into some kind of damned radical," he snapped suddenly. "It would have killed his mother if she'd been alive!"

"Radical? Oh—that strike at the plant. But it's settled, isn't it?"

"Sure it's settled; but Tim won't let it die. He's still siding with the men, thinks I gave them the short end of the stick." An expression of concentrated agony crossed Durham's beefy features. "Why, the little brat started quoting Papal encyclicals on labor at me!"

"That's what they're for, aren't they?" Borgia asked, dryly. "Maybe you don't realize, Bull, that Tim's Catholic education really educated. It just sounds to me as if he's using his free will, making his own Catholic decisions in feeling for the underdog."

DURHAM smacked a hand passionately down on Borgia's desk.

"He'll see things my way or get out! That's what I told him this morning. A kid as wet behind the ears as he is has no business telling his elders where they get off. What the devil does Tim know about labor relations?" The muscles of his jaw knotted. "Did you know he looked in at a couple of the union's open meetings while the strike was on?"

"A little like St. Francis," Borgia murmured. "Down with the fellows with their feet on the bare ground." He glanced keenly at Durham. "You'll be leaving him that plant, someday, won't you? I think you're lucky, even if you don't know it, having a boy who's got the moral courage to want to look at both sides."

Durham's face purpled. "But it doesn't look good!" He protested. "It can't look good. I just want Tim to see things sensibly—"

A buzzer sounded on Borgia's desk. The detective leaned over, snapped a stud and spoke into the intercom. Fawcett's voice rasped metallically: "He's here, Chesty; they picked him up buying a drink of milk from a farmer."

"I hope you're not surprised it wasn't a slug of gin from a bartender." Borgia said out of the side of his mouth to Durham, but the plant owner was already on his way out of the room. Father Hayter nodded to the detective and followed. "Fawcett," the detective continued, "tell the kid I said that if he wants to fight he can't do it by running away."

The faint smile faded from Borgia's face as he cut the intercom off and sat down again. He looked at his watch. There wasn't much time, he knew, for what he'd have to do. A dark, troubled look on his face, now, he picked up his phone and dialed a number.

"St. Batholomew's monastery?" he said, after a moment. "Father Cluff, please." He waited until the abbott had been called to the phone. "Father? Detective Chesty Borgia. My boy Smith still there? Good. Yes, I know his name couldn't be Smith. Listen, Father, I'm sending a police car out there to pick him up. No, don't tell him. Should you count the silverware? Well, turn him upside down if he clanks. Thank you, Father."

He replaced the receiver, ordered a car out to pick up Smith and picked up the phone again. When he finally put it down he took a cigar from his breast

pocket, lighted it glumly and sat in the gathering dark with butterflies in his stomach instead of supper.

An hour later he heard the quick sound of footsteps coming up the stairs. The door opened and a cop came in. Smith followed, handcuffed. "Take them off," Borgia said, rising.

"We needed 'em," the cop said grimly, unlocking the manacles. "You're sure I'm doin' the right thing?"

"It will be safe," Borgia said, patting his shoulder over the concealed holster.

Smith, looking battered, glared at him, voiceless.

The detective put on his velvet fedora, nodded to the door. The cop went first, then Smith. Downstairs, at the desk, Borgia signalled to officer Murphy who was reading the police news bulletin.

"A car," he said. "You'll drive. We'll take Thompson with us, too."

Murphy stared. "Three of us? I thought just you and me would do for the reliquary. Oh, I got it—this kid..."

Borgia shook his head. "There's more than the reliquary to worry about now," he said, and began shepherding Smith toward the door.

Outside, in the car, Borgia turned to Smith and said: "Keep your mouth shut." He said over the back of the front seat. "St. Catherine's church."

MONSIGNOR McGinty, pastor of St. Catherine's, rounder than the detective, but almost twice as tall, was standing outside the parish house smoking a cigaret when the squad car drove up. Murphy parked, got out and saluted respectfully.

The priest's eyes roved to Borgia and he smiled, as the detective appeared from the car. "I fear that my capacity for after-dinner speeches has fallen, Chesty," he said. "Besides, it is hot in the auditorium and abominably full of cigar smoke." He coughed and disposed of his cigaret.

"Has Durham finished yet?" Borgia said. "Talking, I mean."

"Far from it," Monsignor McGinty said with a wink.

"Do you mind if we go in—now?" Borgia asked, and moved toward the gate leading past the parish house.

The priest hesitated only a moment, then nodded and brought up the rear. Borgia led the way behind the church itself to a large, two-story red-brick building with the words: *St. Catherine's Church Auditorium* chiselled in the gray granite lintel over the doors. Murphy held the big front doors open and they all went into a brightly-lit lobby with a statue of St. Catherine standing on one side of a flight of stairs. Murphy and Thompson halted beside the saint. The others passed rapidly up the nearby stairs and down a corridor.

"Er—your young friend..." Monsignor McGinty whispered in an aside to Borgia as they traversed the corridor. "I hope there is a good reason for..."

"There *is* a good reason, Father," the little detective said. He tossed his hat on a long trestle table along one wall, piled high with black homburgs and silk toppers.

The priest threw him an agitated glance, but said nothing. He stopped outside a pair of oak doors halfway down the corridor which was lit by big, crystal sconces. From behind the doors sounded the bull-like voice of Bull Durham. With a touch of impatience, Borgia pushed through. Beyond was a smoke-filled auditorium with a stage at one end and a basketball court at the other. In between stood a number of temporary trestle tables covered with the remnants of a banquet; at the tables about sixty formally-dressed men sat with a scattering of priests and listened to Durham over cigars. The industrialist was on his feet at a table near the stage, dressed in a tight-fitting tuxedo, and talking loudly. His eyes brightened as they saw Monsignor McGinty leading the way down a sort of

aisle between the tables. He paused for a moment as he saw what was following the priest, ahemmed and went on talking.

In the middle of the table before him, like a centerpiece set in its own crown of flowers, rested a gorgeously-jeweled golden box about eight inches long and six inches high, built in the form of a medieval cathedral. It glittered like an old-fashioned Christmas tree with a myriad flashing points of diamond and ruby.

The detective, hurrying along in the priest's wake, stopped suddenly. Durham paused in the middle of a sentence and stared, his whole body tensing.

"That him?" the little detective whispered hoarsely to Smith.

Smith, swallowing hard, nodded. Then Borgia pulled a riot whistle out of his pocket and blew it once. Monsignor McGinty, hurrying to a chair between Durham and Father Hayter, faltered as though shot through the heart.

"Chesty!" he exploded. "In the Name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy...!"

MURPHY and Thompson burst into the room, guns drawn. Murphy took off his cap automatically as his eyes fell upon the priests present.

"An outrage!" The face of Hunt Durham flared like a Bessemer converter under a powerful draft as Borgia walked forward and around the table and waited for Murphy to come up. "Borgia, I'll have you broken down to the axles for this! How—how *dare* you come in here and create an unseemly tumult?" Durham quivered with massive rage, gasping for breath. "Is this a way for a Catholic to greet a priest?"

He was brushed aside abruptly by Smith who hurled himself at Father Hayter. The priest rose to his feet like a man in a dream. For just an instant he seemed caught in a kind of trance, and then his head jerked sideways as Smith's lean right arm licked out and smacked him in the nose. The heavy body tottered and then he fell back into his chair.

The little detective rapped Smith smartly across the cheek with the flat of his hand. "Respect his cloth! That's the only privilege you've got. The cloth is something beside the person!"

"Person?" Durham rapped out. "All I know is, you've allowed this maniac to strike a priest!"

"You judge too much by appearances, Durham," the little man said dryly. "You were perfectly willing to burn your own kid at a private stake because he said a few things outside your experience, and acted a little apart from your standards of respectability. You knew Tim *had* to be decent and honest because he really did think and act like a real, charitable Catholic, and was full of compassion for his fellow men. But that couldn't keep you from thinking that Tim was, all of a sudden, turning into some kind of radical with no regard for life or law. And yet, you didn't think twice about taking a man on his own say-so because he looked the way you thought he should—and made the proper noises, so far as you could interpret them, and listened to you respectfully and silently. All Tim wanted to do was honestly think out a difficult situation, for himself, and all this man wanted was to kill in cold blood and then try to steal."

The detective let his eyes rove over the auditorium, past the other priests of the parish, past seated circles of men appalled to the point of holding their breaths.

"*Cesare*...!" Monsignor McGinty exhaled in agony. "Oh, Sweet Mother of...!"

Borgia coldly watched the man Smith had struck stir groggily, open his eyes, and stare into the muzzle of Murphy's drawn gun.

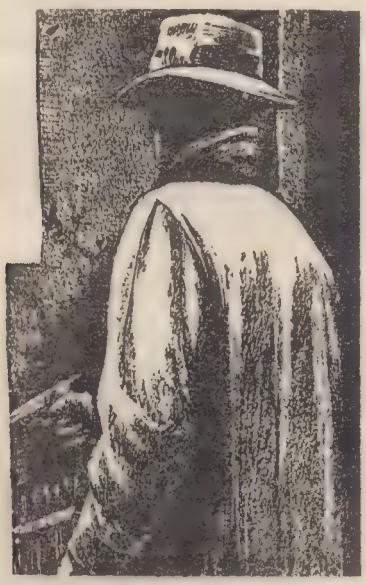
"I would cut my hand off before I hurt a priest," the little man said; "but this man is not a priest." He darted a hand forward and snatched a gun from a shoulder holster inside the man's

burst-open coat. Borgia emptied the clip with a deft motion of his hand and pocketed the deadly things. "I don't know who he is yet, but I know who he isn't. He isn't Father Bill Hayter, who is lying dead on a slab in a hospital morgue!"

A terrible gasp burst from more than fifty throats. Monsignor McGinty's brows contracted in horror.

"You're absolutely certain of this?" he demanded. "You know you *must* to be certain of it, Cesare!"

"I'm certain of it, Father," the little man said wearily. His eyes wandered around the reliquary and fixed on a plate of cake. He picked up a huge gobbet of cake and rammed it into his mouth. "Pardon me," he said thickly. "I need something on the stomach to face anything like this."



BORGIA swallowed convulsively and continued: "This morning, I found out that a man posing as a minister had stolen every dime from a kid bumming his way west on a train." He nodded toward Smith. "The skunk picked his pocket and then bumped the kid off the cars.

"I didn't know I was following a trail then. I almost didn't realize, later, that the trail had started to follow me, past a body in the morgue, to a patch of broken skin of this murderer's knuckles and the blood the cut left on the murdered man's lapels. He'd covered the cut with one of those plastic skins, but in my office some wine got on it and dissolved the plastic partly and it dropped off. I spotted the cut, then—the one he'd gotten when he'd smashed into Father Hayter with an uppercut that broke his neck. And even then I didn't know what he really was. But I did know that there was something very odd about a priest who knew nothing about one of the great controversies affecting Catholics in history—the one about the Borgias, who have been damned on less evidence than convicted Captain Kidd, but who were also great Princes of the Church. Two of them were Popes; Calixtus the 3rd, and Alexander the 6th."

The veiled eyes of the prisoner widened, and Borgia grew grimmer.

"And I couldn't help being suspicious, after that," he went on, "of a priest who talked about ordinary wine as though it would destroy every soul and be a passport to Hell, instead of a pleasure neither good nor bad, in itself. A non-Catholic posing as a priest might advance views like that to sound the way he thought a priest should, but what it was highly unlikely that a priest would, in reality.

"And when I'd remembered that a phony minister had picked a kid's pockets on a train; and that I'd seen a man lying dead whose clothes might well have been a clerical suit; that a Catholic clergyman was due in by train this morning, and then remembered a man lying dead again, murdered... Well, they call the start of that process deduction, and it doesn't matter down what wild, winding pathway it leads a cop; he has to walk it to earn his keep."

The silent auditorium listened as the detective told how he'd phoned East to

find out what Father Hayter really looked like, and that the priest had had an upper set of false teeth and a piece of bridgework and other marks that had tied his name to a man lying dead on a cold slab.

Almost dazedly, Monsignor McGinty stared at the glittering, miniature cathedral. "Of course..." he muttered. "He must have wanted the reliquary; but to kill for it—" He looked up at the prisoner and for just an instant his eyes were clouded with a kind of helpless hatred before he remembered that his work was compassion and struggle for all men's souls—even that of a murderer.

Borgia swallowed another hunk of cake quickly, and nodded. "He's probably a confidence man who found posing as a minister a handy come on," he said. "He separated my friend here from his few dollars and then probably got to talking to Father Hayter. I imagine that the priest told this joker, as one friendly clergyman to another, what he was coming out here for, and most of the details."

He sighed. "To Father Hayter, they were innocent and joyous enough—he never thought of them as deadly. And after that, all the joker had to do was kill Father Hayter in the priest's sleeping compartments—he's big enough to have done that—toss the body out the window after removing every bodily identification mark, and then dispose of the priest's clothes after having done the same with them, knowing that his own would be indistinguishable from Father Hayter's. The best way to do that was to wait until the train had gone on a bit and then heave them after the body. But he retained the shirt and the clerical collar and destroyed them, somehow, because they were the only articles of clothing that would positively have identified a corpse as a clergyman. Maybe he ripped them to shreds and strewed them over the tracks all the way into town. He knew he'd only have to wait a day to grab the reliquary, and that it would be easy to walk off the train with the priest's name and wallet and just be Father Hayter. He must have even known, from the real priest, how he'd be flown out of here the same day, and remembered how easy it would be to step off the plane anywhere East before the terminal airport."

"BUT WHAT a chance he was taking." Durham rumbled. "Even if nobody out here could have known what he looked like."

"Oh, he had a professional faith in appearances," Borgia said, with a frown. "Though a little misplaced. Sure he was taking chances; what else is a bent for crime good for?" He signalled to Murphy and Thompson and the cops marched the prisoner away. Then the little man turned to Smith. "I'll want you to go back to headquarters with me to properly identify this fellow to the extent you can. We'll do the rest. And you can ride home East to your folks on a train with Father Hayter's body. The reliquary will have to wait."

"Thank you, Mr. Borgia," Smith said. "Thank you, *sir!*"

"Who knows?" the little detective said, still frowning. "There may be a reward for the murderer somewhere along his *via dolorosa*, when we find out who he really is." He ate more cake. "I can use my share of it..." He paused, raising a glumly tired and inquisitive eyebrow. "Does it disappoint you, Father, to witness my vulgar attention to the problems of potential Borgia poverty in the midst of death, intellectual ratiocination, and the unrendered cheers of the elite?"

"Requiescat in pace," Monsignor McGinty was murmuring over the memory of a man. "Eh, Chesty? Oh no, not at all. Spoken like a Borgia, or, anyway, the—er—popular concept of one."

★

Special Feature

by James A. Hines

UNDERWORLD TERMS QUIZ

HOW MANY of these "gangster or underworld terms" have been correctly described? Mark them with T for True and F for False, and then check yourself against the definitions on page 98.

1.	Ace of spades	A widow
2.	Badger game	Escaping from prison by digging out
3.	Belly robber	A prison cook
4.	Bent	A pistol
5.	Big drink	The ocean
6.	Big house	A prison
7.	Big noise	A detective or a detective agency
8.	Briars	Blades for a hacksaw
9.	Brownie	A colored person, a Negro
10.	Calling cards	Fingerprints
11.	Camera eye	A sharp eye
12.	Crookdom	The world of crooks and criminals
13.	Damper pad	Material used in the marking of cards
14.	Darksetting	Shooting a person in the back
15.	Dyno	A term used for strength
16.	Eight wheeler	A thief who robs freight cars
17.	Flat catcher	A gullible person
18.	Geezo	A cop
19.	Get under the bunk	Shut up!
20.	Ice-tong doctor	An illegal practitioner who sells drugs

Had this woman died of grief, when she sat up all night with her husband's corpse?

CANDLES FOR THE CULPRIT

by MAT RAND

"SHE SAT up all night with her husband's corpse," Sergeant Gilmore explained. "An' this morning they found her dead."

"I'll take a look," Bell said.

He stood with the Police Sergeant, in the doorway of the small room at the end of the hall in the big country home. The room's green blinds were down, but the winter morning daylight was thin bright streaks at the edges of the blinds, filtering in upon the mute tragic scene. The body of old Martin lay in its coffin which rested on a big table. Tall candles, extinguished now, were beside it; and at the head stood an ornate metal brazier, like a huge incense burner of Oriental design.

The body of Mrs. Martin sat slumped in a chair beside the coffin—a thin little wisp of woman, almost lost in a billowing black taffeta dress. Her head dangled sidewise. Her eyes were closed, as though during this night-long, loving vigil beside her dead husband, she had fallen quietly into eternal sleep.

"So what killed her?"

"That's what we want to know, Mr. Bell. Doc Carter says her health was okay. People don't just die of a broken heart, you know. That's no good for police records."

"What her husband died of," Bell said, "might have something to do with it."

"He died of labor pneumonia," the Sergeant retorted. "He might have pulled through at that, but he got cramps the last day or two."

"Cramps," Bell said, "are especially interesting."

Voices in the hall sounded behind them. "That's the relatives," Gilmore explained. "Two grandsons—they're cousins. An' a grand niece. An' there's the housekeeper. She discovered the old woman's body, about seven this morning. You want to question 'em?"

"I'll talk to them," Bell said.

But instead, he moved into the shrouded room, tall and silent, gazing down at the dead face in the coffin; and at the face of the dead woman in the chair where now a thin shaft of light from an edge of a window blind was striking to show that her bloodless lips were parted as though with a faint smile of contentment that she had gone to join her husband.

"The relatives," Gilmore prompted, "might be worth your attention, Mr. Bell. There's a sweet inheritance, what

I hear. All share alike. An' the old housekeeper—she gets ten grand or so for a legacy."

"I'll talk to them now," Bell said. "I wonder if they're interested in Hindu magic."

The relatives were all tense, exceedingly nervous, excited. Shocked by the tragedy, of course. Surely no one, appraising them now, could have selected one of them to be guilty of a double murder. The two grandsons seemed both under thirty; John Martin slim, handsome, with wavy tousled black hair and a face aristocratic, as his dead grandfather's—a face grim and strained now, with thin pale lips that tried to smile as he shook Bell's hand. And there was his cousin, Jay Sloan—short and round and plump, with sparse pale hair plastered dankly on his beaded forehead.

The girl—Ann Martin—was a little frightened brown dove, clinging to the hand of the middleaged housekeeper who sat beside her. All of them were frightened, as the members of any household would be with mysterious tragedy suddenly striking; and with a Police Sergeant obviously anxious to fasten murder upon them.

"Do we have to go all over it again?" the handsome John Martin protested, as Bell was introduced.

"Not with me," Bell said. "Sergeant Gilmore is puzzled by the death of Mrs. Martin."

"Why wouldn't I be? Gilmore demanded.

"You would," Bell agreed. "Hindu magic is very puzzling. No one can understand it."

THE HOUSEKEEPER—gaunt and dour—involuntarily shifted her chair with a rasp which was startling in the tense silence. She was gazing blankly at Bell. All of them stared blankly.

"What's that mean?" Jay Sloan asked. "Who said anything about Hindu magic?"

"I did," Bell said. "I've been up the Ganges. India is very interesting. Do you suppose Mr. Martin was interested in Oriental occultism by any chance?"

John Martin said: "Yes, he was. Grandfather lived in India, years ago. As a matter of fact, he met grandmother in Benares. They were married there."

"Then she believed in Hindu magic also?"

"An' it frightened her," the housekeeper said with a sudden breathless burst.

"Frightened her?"

"That kind of Oriental stuff would frighten anybody," the housekeeper declared. "It would me. I wouldn't mess around with it. I always told her—"

"I've heard," Bell said, "that a djinn in generally a beneficient sort of fellow. Nobody should be afraid of a djinn."

There was no one smiling. They all looked as though they were shuddering.

"Well, I don't get any of this," Sergeant Gilmore declared.

"We're thinking," Bell said, "that a djinn—a genie you know—may have appeared miraculously to Mrs. Martin last night at her vigil over her dead husband."

"And frightened her to death? Now say, listen—"

"I wish we could summon him tonight," Bell said. "Maybe he was there and saw what happened, who knows? I wish we could summon him and make him tell us. Let's try it, shall we?"

"You'll have an autopsy on both bodies?" Bell suggested, when presently he and the Sergeant were again alone.

"Sure. But the devil of it, Doc Carter had to go to Albany. He'll be back tomorrow and perform the autopsies then."

"Arsenic is apt to give you cramps," Bell said.

Gilmore nodded. "Doc an' I both

thought of that. But the old woman—"

"Didn't die of cramps. Quite true, Sergeant. Let's see what the djinn says tonight—if we can summon him."

"Mr. Bell listen," Gilmore pleaded. "Are you kiddin' me?"

"I never was more serious."

THE BIG hall clock was chiming midnight. There were two occupied coffins now in the little room—coffins with candle-light flickering eerily on them, flickering on the two dead faces and on the drawn faces of the living who sat silently beside them.

Only Bell was on his feet, his tall lean figure painted by the candlelight which cast multiple shadows of him monstrously shifting on the walls as he moved. It was as though in the silent breathless little room, only he and his shadows were alive.

"I'll close the door," he said softly. "If we get that djinn out of his lair, no need to let him escape."

Bell was building a small charcoal fire in the brazier now; and then from a desk in the room corner he came with brown-black sticks of incense.

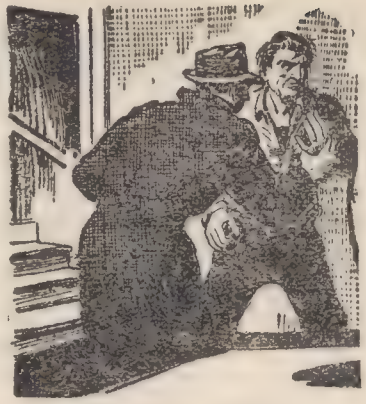
"The Hindu legend as I've heard it," he was saying softly, "is that if you burn this over one who has died, the djinn imprisoned within it will come out. Did Mr. Martin ever tell you that?"

No one answered. Then the handsome, poetic-looking young John Martin responded: "Yes, something like that. Grandfather always said he wanted this incense burned in the brazier beside him when he had died."

"Because the djinn would come to soothe his troubled, departing spirit," Bell said.

"Mrs. Martin promised to do it," the housekeeper said suddenly. "But it frightened her."

Jay Sloan was mopping his perspiring forehead. "If—if we don't actually believe this legend—will that queer it, Mr. Bell?"



"I don't know," Bell said. "I hope not."

Redolent blue-black wisps of vapour were rising now from the big brazier as Bell ignited the incense, dropping a bundle of the little sticks on the charcoal fire.

"Come put, djinn," Bell softly exhorted. "Come out and tell us what happened here last night."

But there was only silence, and the blue-black vapour curling up into the candlelight. Caught by the heat of the candle-flames, it swirled as though surely it were alive, ready to congeal, to take form and become a miraculous Being from the great mysterious valley of the Ganges.

"Come on djinn, let's have a look at you," Bell jibed. "Don't be afraid of us."

The vapour, in spirals where it chanced to be most dense, was casting grotesque shadows of itself on the white room-wall. One might have imaged the shadows showed that the smoke was taking form. A silent Thing, materializing here.

"This is crazy," young Martin suddenly was muttering. "This is—"

His words were stricken away as a chair clattered. On his feet, Jay Sloan stood trembling, his round face suddenly ashen.

"I don't—like this," he gasped. And then he broke. "You fools—we've got to get out of here. We'll be dead, all of us! Get that door and window open

—you idiots—don't you feel queer already?" He was staggering on his feet, wildly terrified, in a panic rushing for the door; but the bulky Sergeant Bell shoved him back.

"You're ruining everything," Bell said.

"Am I? Am I? That—what you don't know—that's arsenic burning in that incense! The fumes of it—we'll be wafted off into death in another minute. Get us out of here, I tell you! Let me out—can't you feel your head reeling already?"

"That's terror and guilty imagination making you reel," Bell said. "That's your murderer, Sergeant. The fumes of burning arsenic are a nasty lethal dose in a small close room like this. He thinks I'm burning the incense he gave Mrs. Martin to burn last night."

Bell was faintly smiling now. "Fortunately, I'm not," he said.

It is altogether fitting that a magazine titled FAMOUS DETECTIVE STORIES should publish an article about that most famous of fictional detectives, Sherlock Holmes. As many readers know, such articles have been appearing for a number of years from the inspired pens and typewriters of the members of the Baker Street Irregulars, and other similar organizations founded on the delightful proposition that Holmes and Watson were real people. Join us, for the moment, in this single fantasy, so that you can appreciate this investigation into

"THE FINAL PROBLEM"

by Irving L. Jaffee

NO DOUBT some readers of *Famous Detective Stories*, familiar with that archaic instrument, the radio, listened with pleasure to some of the recent series of Sherlock Holmes' adventures beamed over one of our major networks here by the British. One of the last tales, "The Final Problem," well known to all as recounting the famous duel-to-death over Reichenbach Falls between the great detective and his arch enemy, Prof. Moriarity, might suggest an interesting possibility to our generation so imbued with the language of psychiatry and Freudian symbolism.

Was Moriarity real, or just a figment of Holmes' imagination? Had the great sleuth, who had so unfailingly within his lifetime been ready to don deer-stalking cap and Inverness cape, and oppose whatever evil troubled the world, become obsessed with the power of evil to the point that he imagined in one person all the malignancy that he had so long and successfully fought all his career? Did Moriarity symbolize the criminal impulses that he had so astutely recognized in his exposure of "The Red-Headed League;" the exotic cunning pregnant in the adventure of the "The Speckled Band," the greed and chicanery inherent in those responsible in "The Blue Carbuncle," and in many, many more exciting cases now part of the folklore of the world?

No one but Holmes seems ever to have seen Moriarity. Even Watson, his faithful companion in so many of the

adventures, never saw him—though he accompanied Holmes to the very Falls themselves. In Holmes' own words we gain some knowledge of this anonymity. "Aye, there's the genius and the wonder of the thing!" he cried. "The man pervades London, and no one has heard of him." Or, again..."I have continually been conscious of some power behind the malefactor, some deep organizing power which forever stands in the way of the law, and throws its shield over the wrongdoer..." Here we have some evidence as to the abstract quality of this enemy Holmes was fighting.

That Sherlock Holmes was something of a neurotic, as we understand the term today, is amply brought out in many of the observations of his most engaging biographer, Dr. Watson. We read early in the memoirs that under his careful scrutiny he had discovered Holmes to be quite prone to day-dreaming and that he would remain inactive in a kind of torpor for days on end, from which he would finally rouse himself in fits of bustling energy—qualities we nowadays associate with the schizoid-type personality. And could not the conception of the Reichenbach Falls themselves suggest to Conan Doyle the very abysses of the subconscious to which his hero had wished to forever plunge the memory of evil that he had resisted so tirelessly, but which still plagued his world—London of the gaslight era?

Devotees of Conan Doyle will remember that this occurred in the spring of 1891, shortly after Holmes had completed some of his most exhausting cases, the most celebrated of these being "The Naval Treaty," and "The Five Orange Pips" in which he unraveled the mysterious circumstances surrounding the death of Colonel Openshaw. Tangible evidence that he was operating under great stress at this time is borne out by further observations in Watson's account of this episode: "I had never seen him like this before," "eyes febrile and shining," "he was very pale and thin," etc.; etc. Was the brilliant and restless mind beginning to succumb to the strain?

IF, THEN, we believe that Holmes was suffering from some deep-rooted, psychotic trauma and that Moriarity, "he of mathematical celebrity," merely the product of Holmes' own disturbed mind, we are led inescapably to the next conclusion that the great detective was bent on nothing else than suicide in his wild flight into Switzerland. Many of the events unfolded in the narrative in question would seem to support this notion.

The farewell note to Watson at the Falls and the alpenstock left at the rail; the purported rendezvous with the world's chief evil-doer; the last, exciting dash to Victoria Station in a carriage driven by a mysterious, black-hooded figure (in this instance, the usually-inept Watson followed directions well—that the unknown charioteer proved to be none other than Holmes' own brother, Mycroft, cannot detract from that); Holmes' casual mention of the burning of the rooms at Baker Street the night before (a fact never to be verified by Watson in the morning paper, by the way); and, finally, the prolonged, subsequent disappearance of the detective after "the encounter" at the bridge.

countless generations to come.

Are these not all master touches pointing to a dramatic staging of a final exit from this world worthy, in dimension, of the man whose exploits had carried him into the many foreign capitals of the world, had matched wits with the greatest criminal minds of the century, and had consorted, in the pursuit of his singular profession, with commoners and kings?

Nevertheless, myth or fact, as we know now, in the end Sherlock Holmes triumphed over this—his most sinister adversary—with his unique and dramatic powers and went on to further adventures to the great delight of numberless readers in his own time and for

1. Baker Street Irregulars will recall that Holmes met with Moriarity again in "The Valley of Fear". However, as is pointed out by Mr. A. G. MacDonell in his essay, "Mr. Moriarity", there is much data to support his contention that this great case was solved in 1889 rather than '99. (See "Baker Street Studies" edited by H. W. Bell): It is Mr. MacDonell's thesis that "To bring back the date of the 'Valley of Fear' from 1899 to 1889, we must assume that Baldwin was released the moment he was convicted, and such a hypothesis is not only dead against the facts as Dr. Watson has recorded them, but is totally out of harmony with the whole spirit of Birdy Edwards' triumph over the Scowrers." Moriarity, then, according to Mr. MacDonell, was conveniently revived by Holmes as an invention to cover up his own slipping powers.

Editor's Note: In "The Chronological Holmes", by William Baring-Gould (Baker Street Irregulars, 1955), the author shows convincingly that the "Valley of Fear" case could only have occurred in 1888. This, however, strengthens Mr. Jaffee's propositions. The pages of *Famous Detective Stories* are open, and our welcome mat is out, to anyone who wishes to essay a refutation to the above.

★

A Pair of Aces in Detective Fiction

A NOOSE FOR MABEL
by Jack Sword

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by Hank Napheys

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INSPECTOR BYRNES GETS HIS MAN!

Special Feature by HAROLD GLUCK

IN 1863, a young man who hailed from Ireland, joined the police force of New York City. Slowly he went up the ranks until, in the year 1880, he was appointed Inspector. With his flowing moustache, cutaway coat, and derby, Thomas Byrnes was a man to be respected—by his colleagues, by the underworld, and by the police officials throughout the world. As a showman, he was tops, for in his exhibit room, he had a rougues' gallery consisting of pictures of famous criminals as well as the implements of their trade. The visitor to his office would see a sand bag, a sling shot, a sectional jimmy, a combination dirk and pistol, hotel key nippers, a dark-lantern, and all other creations of the criminal mind.

The idea of visualization was more than just a bit of showmanship with Byrnes. A crime consisted of actors—the criminals as well as the victim. The background was scenery. The plot consisted of the manner in which the crime took place. Byrnes would visualize a crime and then begin to figure out how it must have been accomplished—and how the criminal could be caught.

One of the toughest of gangs which plagued the city after the War between the States was known as the "Whyos." Their territory was in the Old Five Points section of the city. Their main occupation was Crime in any of its varieties: picking pockets; sneak thievery; dives; holding up gambling games, as well as physically mauling a victim for a set price. You could get a punching job for $2.00; an ear bitten off for $15.00; or the victim would be permanently removed from this world for the sum of $100. And when the Whyos said a man was dead—he sure was dead. Their leader in the early 1880's was

Mike McGloin. His philosophy of life can best be expressed in his own words, "A guy ain't tough until he has knocked his man out!"

Louis Hanier was a saloon-keeper who ran his establishment in the section of the city known as "Hell's Kitchen." He lived in a flat above his saloon. The police arrived upon the scene and all they found was the dead proprietor and three glasses upon the counter; each glass held a bit of brandy. Those were the days before fingerprinting—so the authorities can be forgiven for passing up a possible clue. The report went to Inspector Byrnes: "Killer unknown."

In a bit of armchair deductive reasoning, the Inspector said to his men, "It was Hanier's rum that killed him. By this I mean that three men broke in Hanier's saloon more with the expectation of finding rum than money. They drank deeply and the brandy crazed

their brains. They became noisy and Hanier, arming himself, came to the stair-landing, when one of the half-drunk rowdies let fire at him, wounding him fatally. Terrified at their bloody deed, all three escaped."

At this point the Inspector stopped, for he hadn't a bit of additional data upon which to build his case. But he had come to one highly important conclusion; he had settled in his mind that the killer was among the young rowdy element in the neighborhood. Then came the report of the coroner: ".38 caliber bullet used to kill Hanier."

Now for another bit of armchair logic as the mind of Inspector Byrnes gets to work. "I know the gun is a .38. Somebody had to purchase a gun of this type. I will send my men out to every place where such a gun can be bought. It is possible that after the crime, the gun was sold. That means my boys will have to visit every pawnshop in the city. A gun without bullets is useless, so we'll check up and find out how many sales of boxes of .38 bullets were made previous to the murder."

And that's exactly how Byrnes went about to solve the murder. But he was dramatic to the last detail. Into his office—one at a time—came twelve of his best men. He swore every one of them to secrecy and let each feel he was the only detective on the force being sent out to find the killer. When the reports came, Byrnes learned two vital bits of information.

A week previous to the murder a box of .38 caliber bullets had been sold to a youth connected with the Whyos; and in a pawnshop, one of his detectives had found a .38 caliber gun hocked by Mike McGloin.

"Solved," you would immediately say. "All that has to be done is to send the gun to ballistics, fire it, and make a comparison test!" Alas, ballistics, didn't exist in those days, so like the fingerprints on the three glasses—the clue was of no avail!

MIKE McGLOIN was picked up by the police and brought to Byrnes. He was left alone in Byrnes' exhibit room; then Mike was brought into the Inspector's office. For a few minutes, not a word was said; the Master Actor was waiting for the strategic moment to speak. He nodded his head. That was the signal for his men below to get into action. They had picked up two of McGloin's comrades in the Whyos, whom Byrnes had thought were with Mike the night of the killing. Slowly these two crooks were led across the yard.

"Come here," ordered the Inspector. Mike did—and saw his two buddies below. That was enough to send chills down his spine. "You killed Hanier," began Byrnes, "and it was a terrible thing to do. You and your two friends, filled with brandy, killed an innocent man."

Mike fought for self-control, but the Master Actor had set the scene to perfection. "Stop, for God's sake, Stop!" he shouted. "I'll tell you everything."

You can add a postscript to the case which reads: "They hanged McGloin in the Tombs for the killing of that Frenchman, Hanier!"

★

ANNALS OF CRIME

A MATTER OF DEDUCTION

by T. H. RYDERS

FOR A FRAIL-LOOKING old man of seventy-four, the balmy spring air of Florida would normally indicate peace and quiet. Oliver Bishop was God-fearing and sin-hating and he was almost completely at peace with the world as he sat in his little house trailer in Tampa, weaving baskets.

His repose was shattered by the imperative knock of Malcolm C. Beasley. Assistant Chief of Detectives of the Tampa Police. Beasley introduced himself and stated his business: "Mr. Bishop, your wife Mary has reported the disappearance of your son George and his wife Louise. We'd like to find out if you know anything about it."

Oliver Bishop and his wife had been separated for quite some time, but he knew Mary well. He smiled. "George and Louise were trying to get a job with a carnival; Mary knows that. Just because he hasn't written don't mean anything. He never was much of a letter-writer."

Detective Beasley watched the old man's fingers slowly plaiting the unfinished basket. "How long ago did they leave, Mr. Bishop?"

"About a month ago—as a matter of fact, it was early Easter Sunday," said Bishop. "George told me the night before that he was going to leave early to stay clear of the Sunday rush. They were gone before I got up."

Beasley consulted his notebook. "Could you describe your son and his wife?"

"Nothing very special about them," Bishop replied. "Louise is a slim, pretty sort of girl. George isn't too big a man—just about average, I'd say. He's easy to spot when he walks, because he has a limp. Got hurt in an accident."

Beasley nodded slowly, as if considering something. "Tell me, Mr.

Bishop. This accident your son had—was it a fire?"

"Why yes. Yes, it was. How did you know?"

Beasley took a deep breath and looked at the wrinkled, seventy-four-year-old mask that was Oliver Bishop's face. "I'm afraid I have some bad news for you, sir."

For the sake of the case, Assistant Chief Beasley hoped his identification had been right—but for the sake of the old man, he found himself hoping fervently he was wrong.

IT HAD THE Tampa police stumped. Late in May, two fishermen had been crab-fishing along the undulating shoreline of McKay Bay, an inlet arm of Tampa Bay. A highway cutting across the bay had turned the waters back onto the shore, converting the sandy beach into thick, sticky white mud that constituted an ideal nesting-place for crab, and McKay Bay was known as one of the choicest crab grounds in Tampa.

It was late at night, and the two men—John Edmonson and Charles Murphy—were about to wind up their fishing after a long and gratifying evening. They packed up and headed across the morass of sticky mud which separated them from the 22nd Street Causeway that slices through the water to form a shortcut into the city from the south. As they headed toward the causeway, Murphy flicked on his flashlight to guide them. The only other light was the pleasant glow of the *Sea Breeze* cafe up at one end of the causeway. An occasional truck rumbling by gave brief illumination to the highway.

Abruptly Murphy halted and squinted into the murkey blackness of the moonless night. "What's that up ahead?" he asked, pointing his flashlight beam on the beach ahead.

"Where?" said Edmonson, trying to see what his partner was pointing at.

"Look all the way up there. Near the bushes. Doesn't that look like somebody's hand?"

"Don't see a thing," Edmond said. He reached around to adjust the heavy creel of crabs he was carrying.

Murphy directed the light to a point some ten feet from the highway. "Follow the light, Chuck. Over there near the bushes. I'm sure I see a hand."

The other fisherman peered into the darkness. "My eyes aren't what they used to be," he began. Then: "You're right!" he suddenly said. "It's a hand, all right. Looks like it's probably a woman's hand, too."

He stopped in his tracks and turned to Murphy. "Where's the rest of her?" he asked quietly.

"She must be buried under the mud!"

Murphy shot a worried glance at Edmonson. "Come on, John. Let's see what this is all about."

They let their fishing equipment drop and slushed across the mud to the end of the causeway. A few moments' digging revealed to the amazed fishermen the nude corpse of what once might have been an attractive young woman.

"I think the *Sea Breeze* has a phone," Murphy finally said after a long silence "We'd better get the police out here double quick."

WHEN DETECTIVES J. F. Gray and E. L. Williams and two patrolmen named Chiles and Raulerson responded to the call from the two fishermen, they roped off the area and looked at the body.

"The tide's uncovered her, whoever she is," said Detective Gray. "She didn't drown, that's for sure; the water isn't more than eighteen inches deep, even at high tide."

"Agreed," said William. "It looks like homicide to me; you'd better get hold of the chief."

That was how Assistant Chief Beas-

ley got the case. Detective Gray's call got him out of bed and hustling down to McKay Bay at once.

The detective's reasons for calling it homicide were hard to disagree with. The woman had been put in a cardboard box and covered with quicklime; that could hardly be accidental—and suicide would be difficult to commit that way, to say the least.

Before Beasley had reached the scene, the digging crew summoned by Gray and Williams had exposed a second body, that of a man. As Beasley approached, he saw a worried little knot of police clustered on the causeway, with a huge mob of curiosity-seekers trying hard to push closer to see whatever was going on. They were being restrained by a few harried policemen. Beasley wondered where they had all come from at this hour of the night; fishermen, probably, he decided. Hastily-rigged floodlights beat down, turning midnight into noon.

"Where's the body?" Beasley asked.

"Two, chief, two," said Detective Gray. He pointed out the other body. "That one was in the cardboard box also."

"Same quicklime treatment?"

Gray nodded.

"How'd they die?" Beasley asked. He turned and saw the figure of the coroner come up behind him, and repeated the question.

"Murder," the coroner said complacently. He was evidently annoyed at having been dragged from sleep on this pleasant spring night to come out to McKay. "I'm afraid you have a cute one on your hands. Both the skulls were crushed. The well-known blunt instrument, you know. They both got it at the same time."

"How long ago?" Beasley asked, looking down at the short, stubby figure of the coroner.

"Hard to tell," the coroner said. "But I'd hazard about two weeks, give or take a day or two either way. There's no way of determining too much about them until I have a chance for an autopsy," he said.

As two of the coroner's assistants removed the body, Beasley said, "I hope you can take care of it in a hurry. I have a hunch this case is going to be a rough one."

"Sure thing," the coroner replied. "I'll get right to work."

Now what? Beasley thought to himself. There certainly weren't a hell of a lot of clues; as a matter of fact, he had almost no information at all to go on. Two weeks of shifting tides in McKay Bay had sloshed sand and mud around so thoroughly that any sign of the killer was almost certain to be eradicated. Of course, there might be *something* in the sand, he realized; he'd have to have it sifted through pretty minutely before he could honestly give up.

But, basically, what did he have? Two bodies and a cardboard box, both of which were soaked in quicklime and seawater. All right, if that's what he had, that's what he'd work with.

FAR INTO the night, the investigating team searched the vicinity for anything that might be even remotely connected to the killings. But nothing significant turned.

Beasley left his men to continue the searching operations, and returned to headquarters, with a tentative plan. If someone is dead, the chances are that someone else misses him. Q. E. D., check the Missing Persons file.

That, too, seemed to lead into a blind alley. There was a long list of missing men, from which Beasley picked a group that looked promising. But women?

"Sorry, Chief," he was told. "Missing men we have plenty of—but no missing women."

Beasley glared back at his list of

[*Turn To Page* 82]

FUN FOR MEN

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men again. The telephone shrilled in his ear, and he picked it up quickly.

"Beasley speaking," he said.

It was the coroner. "See if this helps you. The man was about thirty, and weighed somewhere in the neighborhood of a hundred sixty pounds. Around average height, I'd say; he had a couple of identifying marks on him: a pretty bad scar from an old burn on his leg, quite a bit of dental work, and several gold teeth. If you check with the dentists, you may possibly be able to identify him."

"What about the girl?" Beasley wanted to know.

"Not much there, at all. We know she was younger than he was—twenty-two to twenty-four—weighed around a hundred and fifteen. No identifying marks; no scars, no dental work, no nothing. Makes things real simple for you, I know.

"He was wearing a pair of shorts, but she wasn't wearing a thing. There wasn't anything else on either of them; no jewelry of any kind."

"How about those shorts?" asked Beasley. "Were there any laundry marks or anything on them that might help to identify them?"

"Not a thing," the coroner said flatly.

To make it doubly difficult, none of the missing men on Beasley's list bore even a remote resemblance to the coroner's description. Beasley glumly surveyed the list—a fine, healthy one. Missing, one fifty-year old banker. somewhat of a pot belly. Missing, houseboy, age 37, believed to have absconded with someone's silverware. And so on.

But here were two corpses that no one seemed to miss.

Telephone checks with St. Petersburg, across the bay, revealed nothing. They didn't have any outstanding missing people.

Next Beasley checked with the sheriff's office. Nothing there, either. The sheriff had no record of any missing persons. He wished Beasley luck, though, and Beasley thanked him as cordially as he could.

Meanwhile, Sergeant H. V. Murrell, head of Tampa's Identification Bureau, was checking the cardboard box. He submitted it to all the most advanced techniques at his disposal—infra-red, chemical examinations, everything. Finally he brought his report down to Beasley.

"Nothing," he told Beasley. "No fingerprints, no manufacturer's mark. Absolutely nothing."

Beasley slumped into his chair. No clues, no reports of any one missing, not even a possible motive. He examined what few facts he had. Both of them had been killed at the same time by the same means; they had been buried together.

THIS WAS not the work of a fiend. Beasley decided. No; it was a carefully-planned, coolly-executed job. Someone had had a strong motive for killing this couple. And whoever had done it had been a physically powerful man. It had been necessary to transport both the bodies to the scene from wherever they had been killed. It wasn't likely that the murder had taken place on so exposed a place as the beach. So the murderer had had to drag both those bodies over the sand—no easy feat—and bury them there.

It would be a job for someone at least as strong as—well, me, Beasley thought. So the killer must be a fairly big man. Just walking over that muddy sand isn't easy, and dragging two bodies—

Very well, then; the man the police wanted was a big strong guy who knocked off an unidentified man and woman and buried their bodies in an unidentifiable cardboard box full of quicklime. Why had it been done? What was the motive for the murder?

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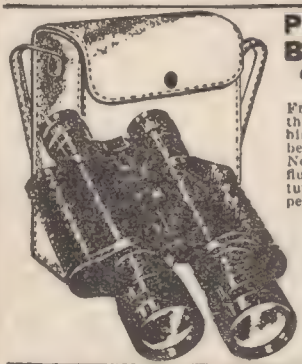
FOUNTAIN BRUSH!

Washes Cars, Floors, Windows

This Hi-Pressure fountain brush is available to you direct from the factory—you save $3 as a result! Attach to your garden hose and wash your car sparkling clean in 7 to 10 minutes! Detergent pills (supplied with brush) go in brush head and a special rotary action gives you sudsy spray. Easy, simple! 3-ft. telescope handle. Silky Durostyrene brush. Complete kit only **1.98** Order No. 444



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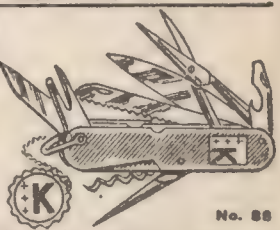
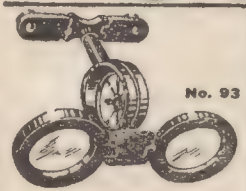


No. 88

saw	awl
ice-pick	can opener
scissors	corkscrew
jackknife	small knife
screwdriver	bottle opener

The most famous utility knife in the world at a greatly reduced price! The Swiss Army knife is recognized by sportsmen and hobbyists to be the most compact multi-purpose tool ever developed. This new Korium version is made of the finest Solingen steel. Each of the 10 separate tools is easy to open—easy to use—no jamming or slipping. Has belt attachment or can be carried in pocket. 3¾ inches. Solid Vidal handle. Solingen steel assures years of dependable service even with roughest handling. Regularly $8 to $12—now **3.95**



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Measures Speed, Distance—Gives Accurate Time!

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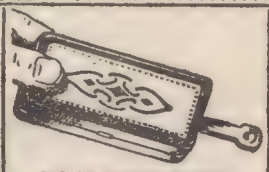

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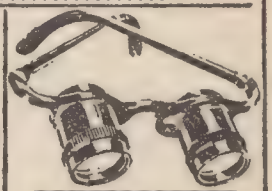

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No. 198

Newest German Telescope Enlarges Area 144 Times, Gives Sharp, Clear Close-ups!

Extra powerful! Super sharp & clear! Real triumph of West German industry and wizardry! Nothing under $10.00 can beat it! Ideal for great distances, plane & ship spotting, celestial work, etc. Draw tubes of chrome plated steel. Coated objective lens. Superb quality and workmanship. A really great bargain at this special price . . . only . . **4.98**

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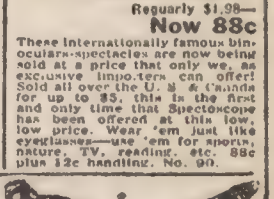

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Black Forest Hunting Knife
NOW ½ PRICE

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Supply limited—Order by No. 80.

Order items by number on guarantee of satisfaction or money back. Send m.o., check or cash for free delivery. (COD's sent plus postage.) Rush to:

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Robbery? Possibly, but it didn't sound right to Detective Beasley; a stickup man usually doesn't take such pains to dispose of his work. Besides, a robber normally doesn't bash in the skulls of his victims.

Beasley's years of police work helped him out with a hunch that a less experienced man might not have had. To Beasley, the thing looked like an emotional killing—jealousy, or vengeance, rather than greed. And if his hunch was true, it gave him a lead of sorts.

Ybor, a Latin-American section of Tampa, had produced the greater portion of crimes of passion in the city for years. It seemed a logical place to begin looking. So, a squad of detectives descended on Ybor to do some leg work.

Had there been any fights in the neighborhood? Who'd been quarrelling with whom, and what were they quarrelling about? Beasley's men checked on family arguments, business disputes, and street haggles. And, time after time, they found the principals involved were still alive. Not always in the best of physical condition, but still alive.

Assistant Chief of Detectives Malcolm Beasley was beginning to wonder if he was ever going to find a solution.

There had to be one; that he knew. Corpses do not materialize out of nowhere, complete with quicklime and gold teeth, for the sole purpose of harrowing a department of innocent, well-meaning cops. The bodies had once been alive, and someone had killed them. But *who*—and *why?*

"Here's another Missing Persons report, Chief." One of the detectives had stepped into Beasley's office and laid a sheet of paper on the desk. Beasley felt a sudden illogical flash of irritation that still another case should be dumped on him while he was still wrestling with this one, but then he realized that he was being foolish. "It

[*Turn To Page* 86]

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Your chance to have eyes in back of your head. See behind or alongside and no one knows you are watching. Fun everywhere you go.
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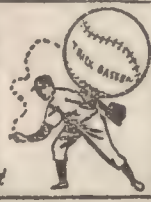
It bounces cockeyed, it curves, it dips, it's impossible to catch. It's sure to set all the kids on the block spinning after it. There's a barrel of fun in every bounce of this amazing baseball. No. 158 **50¢**



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They move! They talk! They're weird! Guaranteed to shut the blabbermouths up for good. It'll really embarrass them. It's a set of big false teeth that when wound up, start to chatter away, like crazy. A great comic effect for false teeth on cold nights.
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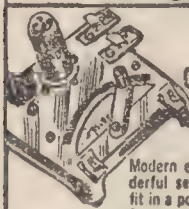

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Pocket Size . . . Brings in stations up to 1000 miles away

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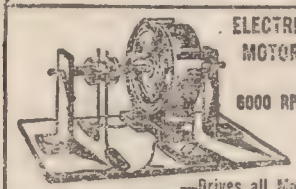

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looks like it might be a lead," the detective said. "It certainly can't do us any less good than this stuff we've been following in Ybor."

BEASLEY glanced over the report and then reread it with greater interest. A Mrs. Mary Bishop was worried about her son and her daughter-in-law. George Bishop, the son, was a wood-carver, and a rather quick and clever man with his hands. He usually worked with carnivals during the summer and spent the winter months with his parents in Tampa. He and Louise, his wife, had left as usual only a short time before—just about the time that the murder of the unidentified couple had occurred.

Since their departure, their mother had not received any communication from them at all, despite George's promise that he'd "try to write." There had been no postcards, no letters, no telegrams. So Mrs. Mary Bishop was worried, and she wondered if the police could help her.

"Let's take a trip out and see her," Beasley said.

Mrs .Bishop did not try to conceal her apprehension as the officers spoke to her about her son and daughter-in-law.

"George isn't what you might call a regular writer," she explained, "but I know I'd have gotten a card or something by this time."

"I understand George and his wife used to live with you and your husband during the winter months," Detective Beasley commented.

Mrs. Bishop explained that that had been a former arrangement; since recently, when she and her husband, Oliver, had split up because of a little quarrel, the children had lived with Oliver.

[*Turn To Page* 88]

ORIENTAL
"SAMURAI WARRIOR"
HUNTING KNIFE

$4.44

SIGN OF THE DRAGON
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The handle is ornamented on both sides by glowing Ruby-Red insets with a blown White Feather effect inside. A unique "Pagoda" hand-guard enriches the oriental styling. And down the center of the gleaming blade is embla zoned the terrifying secret symbol of the Orient—the "Sign of the Dragon"—illuminated in brilliant Red and Gold. Complete with an unusual Double-snap sheath of Genuine Metal-studded Leather.
This "Samurai Warrior" Knife is a hunter's delight and an ideal collector's item—handsome enough for any room. You'll want a matched pair for your den or recreation room.

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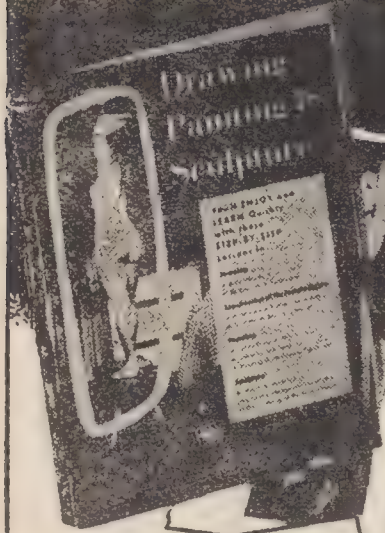

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The detectives got as much information as they could from Mrs. Bishop, then they decided to call on Oliver Bishop. The old man lived in a small trailer which, like many bachelor apartments, was untidy and littered. There were woven baskets and clothing hung around the place, a pair of muddy shoes in a corner, and Oliver Bishop's basket-weaving materials heaped almost everywhere.

A short talk with the old man convinced the detectives that the corpses in the morgue were the bodies of George and Louise Bishop, especially after old Oliver mentioned the burn scar on his son's leg.

"We think we've found your son and daughter," Assistant Chief Beasley said, in as kindly a voice as possible. "I wonder if you'd mind coming down to the morgue to identify them."

Oliver Bishop's old, feeble-looking frame seemed to quiver a little as he silently followed the officers out to the car. He didn't say a word during the trip that followed.

"That's George and Louise, all right," he said softly when they showed him the bodies. His hands, clenching the back of a chair, grew white at the knuckles as he stood there in silence for a moment. Then he turned away, his eyes filled with tears, his hands shaking.

"I—I'm sorry we had to subject you to this, Mr. Bishop," said Beasley gently. "I'll have a squad car drive you home. And remember, we'll be doing everything we can to find the person who did this."

The old man nodded. "God's justice will be done," he said. "God's will always prevails."

THEN BEASLEY went to work with a vengeance. He knew who the two were, now, and at last he had something to work with. First, the car. George and Louise Bishop had pre-

[*Turn To Page* 90]

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Try this: on a windy day, hold a lit match just inside a **CLOSED** window. The first strong gust of wind will blow it out. **NOW** put up a **TRANS-KLEER** window...you'll find that a lit match will **NOT** blow out **EVEN IF YOU KEEP YOUR REGULAR WINDOW OPEN!** No wonder so many have been sold! No wonder so many home owners, hospitals, farmers, buildings and churches are switching to **TRANS-KLEER!** To avoid disappointment, rush your order **NOW**—while our supply lasts! **SEND NO MONEY.** Simply fill in coupon and mail at once. Pay postman only 4.95 plus a few cents postage. Try a window for 5 days—test it. If not delighted, return the other 9 for **FULL REFUND. SPECIAL OFFER FOR BULK BUYERS: 8.95** for 2 full kits (216 sq. ft.); **20.95** for 6 kits; **36.95** for 12 kits. **ACT NOW!** Mail the coupon **TODAY. (CANADIANS:** avoid tariff. Send direct to Thoresen Ltd., Dept. US-47, 45 St. James St. W, Montreal 1, P.Q.)

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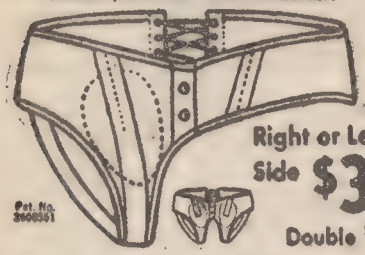

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sumably left their father's home early on the morning of Easter Sunday in their car in order to drive with some carnival or other. Beasley ordered a check on the carnivals, and put a flyer on the Bishop car.

And it wasn't long before the car turned up. The new owner had papers to prove that the automobile had been sold to him, and the papers were signed "George Bishop." A check on the man who purchased the car showed he knew nothing whatever about the Bishop murder.

A check of the car, however, was not fruitless. The new owner never used the back seat of the car, so he had never bothered to have it cleaned. An examination of the upholstery revealed the existence of some large grease spots. The upholstery went to Sergeant Murrell's laboratory for identification and examination, despite the protests of the unfortunate new owner.

This time, Sergeant Murrell's report was more satisfying. Underneath the grease stains were spots that definitely were human blood. It was Murrell's opinion that someone had put the grease on the cloth deliberately, in order to hide the bloodstains.

A comparison of the handwriting on the car's bill of sale and specimens of handwriting known to be that of the late George Bishop revealed that the bill of sale had been forged. It didn't take an expert to spot it, either, because it wasn't actually a forgery. No attempt had been made to counterfeit the wide, sweeping loops of George Bishop's signature; the forger had simply scribbled the name in his own taut, sharp-edged hand, and left it at that.

It was real, good, solid evidence, but Beasley wasn't quite sure where it pointed. So he decided to do some more questioning.

And a second questioning of Mary Bishop, George's mother, brought out even more pertinent data. Mrs. Bishop

[*Turn To Page 92*]

RACING CAR DRIVER FRANK KOHN SAYS: "THIS REVOLUTIONARY PRODUCT HAS INCREASED MY CAR SPEED & POWER UP TO 50%—STOPPED OIL BURNING"

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The results lasted for over 5,000 grueling miles and when I pulled the engine down later I could still see the sealer.

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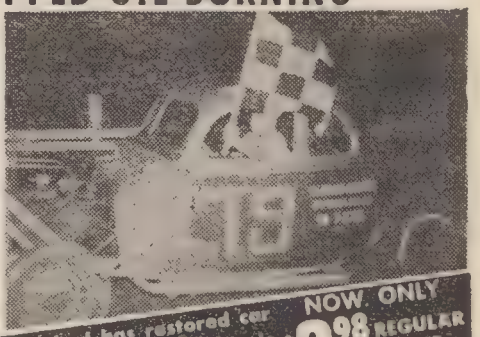
Frank Kohn
Philadelphia, Pa.



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Compression Readings—1945 Dodge Truck

	Cylinder 1	Cylinder 2	Cylinder 3	Cylinder 4	Cylinder 5	Cylinder 6
Before	87 lbs.	75 lbs.	75 lbs.	60 lbs.	75 lbs.	85 lbs.
After	100 lbs.	110 lbs.	115 lbs.	95 lbs.	105 lbs.	118 lbs.

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Compression Readings — 1948 Pontiac

	Cylinder 1	Cylinder 2	Cylinder 3	Cylinder 4	Cylinder 5	Cylinder 6	Cylinder 7	Cylinder 8
Before	105 lbs.	95 lbs.	107 lbs.	120 lbs.	110 lbs.	115 lbs.	95 lbs.	123 lbs.
After	125 lbs.	120 lbs.	120 lbs.	125 lbs.	122 lbs.	120 lbs.	115 lbs.	116 lbs.

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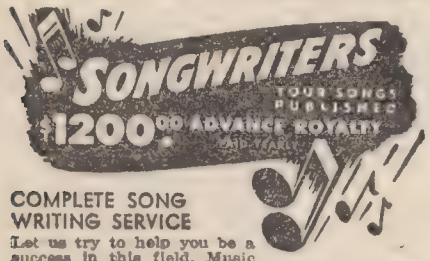

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had somewhat reluctantly stated that George and Louise had never been legally married.

It seemed that they were not-too-distantly related to each other, and they had been afraid that they might not be issued a marriage license because of this. It had had them worried for a while, almost to the point of calling the whole thing off, until the practical mind of George Bishop had very neatly solved the knotty problem in a way that was, to them at least, eminently satisfactory.

He had simply purchased Louise an engagement ring and a wedding ring and put them on her ring finger, left hand. That was that. As far as they were concerned, from that time on they were married.

WHEN THEY came to live with George's parents, they told everyone that they were married. Rather than allow such a scandalous business to get out into the open, Oliver and Mary Bishop had chosen not to contradict George's story publicly; as far as the world was concerned, whenever anyone should ask, they were married.

But, as Mary Bishop told it to Beasley's men, the whole idea didn't set well with Oliver at all, not at all. He was, like the stern old patriarch he pictured himself as, continually lecturing his son and daughter-in-law on the godlessness of their ways, and insisting that they repent of their sins immediately.

It was one of these quarrels that had caused Mary Bishop to break with her husband.

This new information was enough to convince Malcolm Beasley that his original hunch was right: this killing was a premeditated crime of passion. But he didn't like the way it was pointing at all. It seemed completely incredible.

[*Turn To Page 94*]

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Nevertheless, he thought he saw the answer, and he proceeded to go out to verify his deductions. He went back to talk to old Oliver Bishop.

The trailer was no neater than it had been before—Beasley wondered how the old fellow felt, a bachelor again after so many years of married life—and Oliver was still busily plaiting baskets.

"Could I talk to you for a few minutes, Mr. Bishop?" Beasley asked.

"Why, certainly, officer. What is it?" The old man looked up from his basket-making. Beasley was struck by the sadness in his eyes.

"Why didn't you tell us that George and Louise were never married?" Beasley said suddenly.

A quick fire sprang into the old man's eyes. "You know that? You know they were living in sin together, flaunting the laws of God and man?" His hands stopped their busy work on the basket. "I knew his sins would disgrace me some day. He always walked in his own path." Oliver's attention returned to his basketwork.

Beasley's eyes moved around the trailer, trying to spot something he remembered he had seen the first time he was there. Then he looked back at the septuagenarian. "Mr. Bishop," he said, slowly and carefully, "do you do quite a bit of fishing? Crab hunting? That sort of thing?"

"No, sir, never. I don't care for fishing. It's a pastime that just don't appeal to me," Oliver said. "I never go out for that sort of thing."

Beasley nodded, assimilating the old man's remark. Then, in the same calm, level tone, the detective said: "Mr. Bishop, why did you kill George and Louise?"

THE OLDSTER looked startled, but he recovered quickly "Officer, are you crazy?"

"No," said Beasley. "I just want to know why you killed them." Beasley

looked at the brown, lined face, and wondered for a fleeting second whether he really *was* crazy.

The old man stood up. "I don't intend to sit here and have you tell me this sort of damnable foolishness! I'm a good Christian, officer. Can you dare to accuse me of killing my own children?"

Detective Beasley pointed at the pair of muddy shoes over near the door. "Those are your shoes, aren't they? How did you get mud on them—the white, sticky mud of the crab grounds at McKay Bay? That mud came from near the spot where we found George and Louise Bishop buried." He paused and looked straight into Oliver Bishop's age-yellowed eyes. "And you just said that you don't do any fishing."

"I didn't kill those two youngsters," Bishop maintained stoutly.

But, under Beasley's expert interrogation and insistent pounding after the facts, the old man began to waver. Beasley, after his initial moment of hesitation, now was sure that he had found the man, wildly improbable though it seemed.

Oliver kept on maintaining his innocence for a while, but his self-assurance eventually began to waver.

Finally, after one of the detective's questions, the old fellow paused for a while, then said: "Mr. Beasley, do you think they would electrocute a man as old as me?"

The detective's face didn't change, but he felt excitement within him. Oliver Bishop had finally cracked.

"Tell me about it," he said calmly. Bishop continued to toy with the unfinished basket in his hands, moving it from hand to hand aimlessly. He seemed to be arranging the facts in his mind, puzzling over the details before he spoke.

[*Turn Page*]

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And then, without any further pressure, Oliver Bishop confessed.

That last night—the eve of Easter Sunday—old Oliver had found that he could bear his son's godlessness no longer. He felt consumed by a divine mission; he had felt himself to be the instrument of the long-delayed Vengeance of the Lord. Arming himself with a windowsash weight, he had crept into the young couple's bedroom while they slept.

One powerful, unregretted blow with the heavy weight had crushed George's skull. The noise had awakened Louise, who, hysterical with fear, had run out into the yard. She was trying to climb over the fence that had trapped her when Oliver caught up with her. The sash weight descended for the second time.

Then Oliver had carried the two to the car and put them in the back seat. He removed their clothes and the girl's rings. The clothes he destroyed later, and he gave the jewelry away.

The next step was to drive to the beach, early in the morning, and dig a shallow grave for the two of them. He put them into a box filled with quicklime, which he had hoped, would make the corpses unidentifiable. After they were buried, Oliver Bishop had gone home to pray.

DETECTIVE BEASLEY listened to the whole story without interrupting the old man. Finally, when Oliver seemed to have nothing more to say, the detective said quietly: "That's not all of it. Tell me the rest."

The oldster looked genuinely surprised at the officer's words. "That's all there is," he said. "I mean it; there isn't any more to tell."

"Yes, there is. Who helped you?"

Bishop shook his head from side to side. "Nobody. Nobody helped me. I

[*Turn To Page* 98]

WHAT Every AUTO MECHANIC Wants to Know

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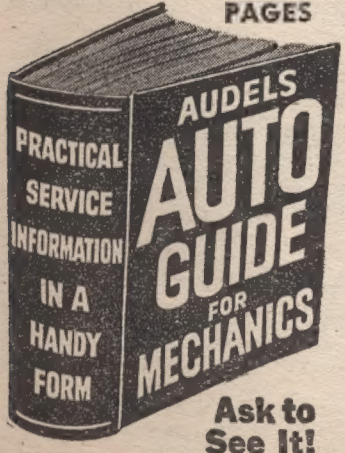

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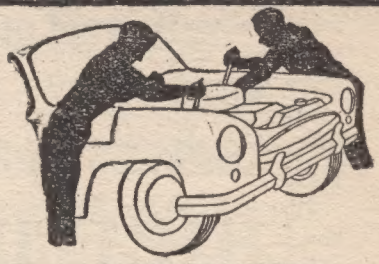

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did it all by myself. I was the Sword of the Justice of God."

"Now, look," Beasley said, "you can't expect me to believe that an old, feeble fellow like you—"

The old man half-grinned. He threw down the unfinished basket. "I guess I sure fooled you with that feeble act. Feeble! I ain't nearly so weak as I act."

It was hard for Beasley to believe, and it was just as hard for the other officers who had come with him to Oliver Bishop's trailer. But the oldster proved his point. One of the detectives, a man weighing in the neighborhood of a hundred eighty pounds, lay down on the floor at Beasley's orders.

"Relax completely," Beasley told him.

Oliver Bishop stooped and, with little display of effort, lifted the burly policeman. It was a fantastic show of strength for a man of Bishop's years.

That convinced the police. Bishop, and Bishop alone, had carried out murder and burial. He was arrested and charged with the first-degree slaying of George and Louise Bishop.

Assistant Chief of Detectives Malcolm Beasley had managed to break the case with very little real evidence; he had only a few bits of circumstantial evidence to operate on. The rest had been sheer bluff, combined with his knowledge of police methods and criminal psychology. The clincher had been Oliver's mud-encrusted shoes.

Oliver Bishop's confession stood up in court, and he was sentenced to life imprisonment for his crime. It was the judge's opinion that "only the murderer's age has saved him from the electric chair."

The far-from-feeble old man was taken to the State Penitentiary, still unshaken in his firm belief that he had acted rightly in the eyes of his Lord.

★

ANSWERS To The Underworld Terms Quiz

1. True. Ace of spades is a widow in a gangster's lingo.
2. False. A badger game is blackmailing of a man by a woman.
3. True. A belly robber is a prison cook.
4. False. Bent means stolen; illegal; of criminal nature.
5. True. Big drink means the ocean.
6. True. Big house means a prison.
7. False. A big noise is a prison warden. In a gangster's lingo, "big man" means a detective, or a detective agency.
8. True. Briars are blades for a hacksaw.
9. False. A brownie is a child, also a term used for a type of a machine gun.
10. True. Calling cards are fingerprints.
11. False. A camera eye is a person who a good memory for faces.
12. True. Crookdom means the world of crooks and criminals.
13. False. A damper pad is a bank book.
14. False. Darksetting is courting at night.
15. False. In a gangster's lingo, dyno, means liquor.
16. True. A eight wheeler is a thief who steals or robs freight cars.
17. False. A flat catcher is a swindler.
18. False. A geezo is a convict.
19. True. The gangster term "get under the bunk" means to shut up.
20. True. An ice-tong doctor is an illegal practitioner who sells drugs.

★

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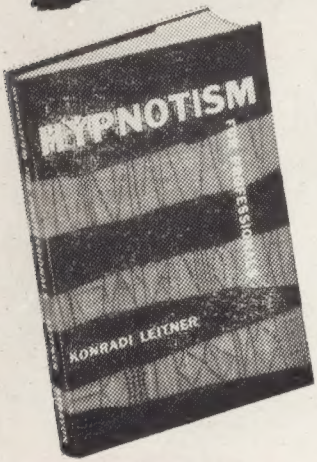

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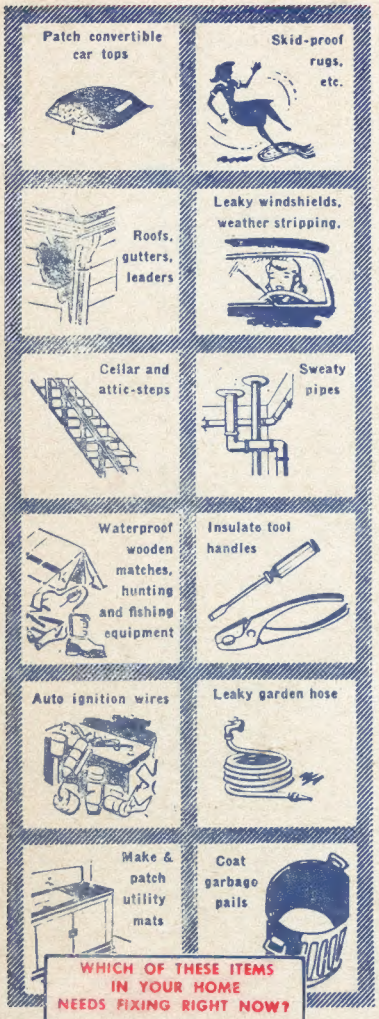

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